DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 838 CE 046 386

AUTHOR	Feldman, Deborah
TITLE	JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. Volume II: A General Planning Guide for Local Users.
INSTITUTION	Washington State Dept. of Employment Security, Olympia.
SPONS AGENCY	International Business Machines Corp., Armonk, N.Y.; National Commission for Employment Policy (DOL), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Mar 86
NOTE	178p.; A product of the JTPA Evaluation Design Project. For related evaluation materials, see CE 046 385-393.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC08 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cost Effectiveness; Data Collection; Educational Legislation; *Employment Programs; *Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; Evaluation Needs; Federal Legislation; *Local Issues; Needs Assessment; *Program Evaluation; *Research Design; Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS	*Job Training Partnership Act 1982; Service Delivery Areas

ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to assist states and service delivery areas (SDAs) in addressing the new oversight responsibilities and opportunities stipulated by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) with respect to planning a local evaluation. The following topics are covered in the individual chapters: the objectives and scope of JTPA evaluation (choosing to evaluate and reviewing JTPA evaluation materials and options); preliminary planning issues (assessing evaluability, building in utility, and understanding the organizational context); progression toward a JTPA evaluation plan (formulating evaluation questions and a research design, developing an evaluation plan, and estimating evaluation costs and benefits); and implementation issues (collecting and using data and funding and staffing a JTPA evaluation). A conclusion and suggestions for further reading are also provided. A report by Bonnie Snedeker entitled "A Report on a National/State Survey of Local JTPA Constituencies" is appended. (MN)

****
*   Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made   *
*   from the original document.   *
****

ED278838

JTPA EVALUATION DESIGN PROJECT

JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level

Volume II: A General Planning Guide for Local Users

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D Feldman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 046 386

By Deborah Feldman

March 1986

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Special appreciation is expressed to the National Commission for Employment Policy, for serving as the project's national sponsor and contributing substantial staff consultation to the project as it developed.

Project Development and Coordination:

Washington State Employment Security
Isiah Turner, *Commissioner*

Project Funding:

National Commission for Employment Policy
IBM Corporation
Washington State Employment Security

CONTEXT OF THIS VOLUME

This is one in a series of volumes produced by the JTPA EVALUATION DESIGN PROJECT.

PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this project has been to develop a set of evaluation tools that are useful to states and local service delivery areas (SDAs) in judging the way their JTPA programs are being managed and the impact they are having. The intention has been to base these analytic and managerial tools on sound program concepts and research methods, and to design them such that the information obtained is of practical and direct use in improving JTPA policies and programs at the state and local level. This kind of information is also expected to make a unique contribution to national training policy and Federal oversight of JTPA.

It is hoped that these volumes will stimulate and support state and local evaluation efforts in JTPA, and promote more consistency than in previous programs with respect to the issues studied and the methods used to investigate them. An important goal is to encourage the generation of complementary information on program implementation and impact that is comparable across states and SDAs. Comprehensive, comparable information is essential to the development of a valid and reliable knowledge base for resolving problems and improving programs. It is also required for adjusting national training strategies to changing needs and priorities at the state and local level.

PRODUCTS

Consistent with this purpose and philosophy, the project has produced a set of materials to assist states and SDAs in evaluating their programs. These are to be useful in planning, designing and implementing evaluation activities. As an integrated collection, each set is developed to support comprehensive evaluations over the JTPA planning cycle.

The careful tailoring of these materials to state and local users is appropriate. JTPA represents a new employment and training policy shaped not only by the experience of managers and the perspectives of employers, but by scientific assessments of previous approaches for addressing unemployment, poverty and other barriers to economic security. In this context, the value of JTPA programs is also expected to be judged. In fact, the Act's assessment requirements are more explicit and sophisticated than those of any employment and training legislation to date. It clearly distinguishes between *monitoring* activities, whose purpose is to determine compliance (such as with performance standards) and *evaluation* activities, whose purpose is to determine how a program is being managed and implemented, and the kinds of effects it is having on recipients and relevant others. Equally significant, new constitutencies are expected to make these more rigorous assessments. States and SDAs now have this important responsibility. It is the first time in the history of employment and training programs that the Federal government's evaluation role has been significantly reduced.

This change affords states and local areas opportunities to influence public policy. It also requires them to assume new oversight responsibilities. Program evaluation is expected to become an integral part of the management of organizations administering, planning and delivering public training services. This is as it should be. The more information available at these levels, where changes in organizations can most readily be made, the more effective the management of JTPA programs. This project was undertaken in that context.

The evaluation tools produced by the project have been developed with a sensitivity to the differing needs, interests and resources of state and local users. They have been packaged into a single comprehensive and integrated set of volumes called *JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level*. The set contains planning and evaluation *guides* and *issue papers*. The following volumes are available in the set:

Volume	**Author**
I: Overview	Project Team
II: A General Planning Guide	Deborah Feldman
III: A Guide for Process Evaluations	David Grembowski
III Supplement: Some Process Issues at the State Level	David Grembowski
IV: A Guide for Gross Impact Evaluations	Carl Simpson
V: A Guide for Net Impact Evaluations	Terry Johnson
VI: An Implementation Manual for Net Impact Evaluations	Terry Johnson
VII: Issues Related to Net Impact Evaluations	
A. Issues in Evaluating Costs and Benefits	Ernst Stromsdorfer
B. The Debate Over Experimental vs. Quasi-Experimental Approaches	Ann Blalock
VIII: MIS Issues in Evaluating JTPA	David Grembowski

NOTE: Although each of the discrete products listed above is the responsibility of a single author, each seeks to incorporate the results of professional peer review, the many excellent recommendations of the advisory group, and the ideas and suggestions of the numerous practitioners interviewed in the process of developing these materials.

To further qualify these volumes, Volume III is accompanied by a supplement for state users. This is consistent with the significant differences between states and SDAs in the kinds of process issues that are most essential to study. The volume on net impact evaluations is sufficiently technical, because of the statistical methods involved, that a practical manual has been written to accompany it. This guide and manual tend to be more appropriate for states, since relatively large sample sizes are required for analysis. However, they are equally useful to larger SDAs and consortia of smaller SDAs which may want to jointly study the net impact of their programs. Regional evaluations, for example, can be very productive in providing management information relevant to regional labor markets. Although there is a separate issue paper on evaluating costs and benefits, this issue is also covered in the gross impact and net impact guides. In this respect, the user benefits from three related but different approaches to this important element of program evaluations. Also, the user should be aware that the Appendix of Volume II includes *A Report on a National/State Survey of Local JTPA Constituencies*. This survey was carried out by Bonnie Snedeker, with the assistance of Brian O'Sullivan, to provide additional input from practitioners to the development of the planning and process evaluation guides.

In conclusion, several expectations have directed the development of these volumes:

THE GUIDES

The General Planning Guide

This guide is to assist users in *planning, funding and developing an organizational capacity* to carry out process, gross outcome, and net impact evaluations and to *utilize their results*. Separate state and local versions are available.

The Evaluation Guides

These volumes are to have the following characteristics:

☐ The guides are to *complement* one another.

- They are to provide information on program management and other characteristics of program implementation, which can:
  - Describe the way in which administrative, managerial and service delivery policies and practices operate to affect outcomes, as a set of interventions separate from the program's services.
  - Pinpoint the source, nature and extent of errors and biases for which adjustments must be made in gross and net impact evaluations.
  - Help explain the results of gross and net impact evaluations.
- They are to provide information on aggregate gross outcomes, and outcomes differentiated by type of service and type of recipient, which can:
  - Describe relationships between certain implementation modes and service strategies, and a broad array of client and employer outcomes.
  - Help explain the results of net impact evaluations.
  - Suggest the more important outcomes that should be studied in net impact evaluations.
  - Help sort out those aspects of implementation that may be most critical to study in process evaluations.
- They are to provide information on net impact (the program's return on investment), which can:
  - Closely estimate the effect of the program's services on clients.
  - Suggest which services and client groups are most important to study in broader but less rigorous gross impact studies.
  - Help identify the decision points in program implementation (particularly service delivery) which may be most important to study in process evaluations.

☐ The guides are to enable the user to carry out *comprehensive assessments* of JTPA programs.

- They are to allow the user to acquire several different perspectives on the same program within a particular time period: on program implementation, on outcomes for clients and employers and on net impact.
- They are to permit the user to interrelate these different kinds of information to gain a wider understanding of what is happening in a program and why.

☐ The guides are to describe approaches and methodologies as consistently as possible, to achieve *comparability*.

- They are to define variables and relationships as similarly as possible.
- They are to define research designs, and methods of data collection and analysis using as similar concepts as possible.

☐ The guides are to *draw from past research* on employment and training programs, as well as seek *new* approaches and methods of specific value in evaluating JTPA at the state and local level.

- They are to replicate, to the extent possible and feasible, the issues and measures reflected in Federal monitoring and evaluation decisions.
- They are to make selective use of the results of relevant CETA studies, national studies of JTPA, and issue papers on JTPA evaluation by national public interest organizations in the employment and training area.
- They are to rely on the professional literature in applied social research.

THE ISSUE PAPERS

Volume VII contains two issue papers which serve as companion pieces to the preceding volumes on net impact evaluation. The first paper on cost-benefit issues is designed to help users identify, measure and analyze relationships between monetary and nonmonetary costs and benefits in determining the program's return on investment. The second paper examines the pros and cons of different research strategies associated with the net impact approach. The final volume on MIS issues is to assist users in better understanding how JTPA and other employment and training *management information systems* can efficiently support the evaluation of program implementation and impact.

THE SET OF VOLUMES

The set is *integrated*, but affords *flexible use*. The user can utilize the entire set for comprehensive evaluations over a two-year planning cycle or longer planning period, or the user can apply the information in each volume independently, based on the most pressing evaluation priorities and timeframes and given the extent of resources, during a particular fiscal year or biennium.

It should be understood that although evaluation products have been developed for JTPA, their basic principles and methods can be applied more broadly by states and local areas to evaluate other employment and training programs and other social programs.

GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The JTPA EVALUATION DESIGN PROJECT was developed and carried out based on the partnership philosophy that underlies the JTPA legislation. Several partnerships should be recognized for their substantial contributions to the products previewed here: the project development and coordination partnership; the public-private funding partnership; the interdisciplinary design partnership; and the advisory partnership.

The Development and Coordination Partnership:
Washington Employment Security Department

Project Coordinators: Gary Bodeutsch, Ann Blalock

Assistant Coordinators: Deborah Feldman, Chris Webster

Interdivisional Consultants:

Training Division: Martin McCallum, Brian O'Neall, Ross Wiggins

Research and Information Systems: Jeff Jaksich, Mike Gioimo, Irv Lefberg

The Public/Private Funding Partnership

Funders:

IBM Corporation: Corporate Support Program, Armonk, NY

National Commission for Employment Policy, Washington, D.C.

Washington State Employment Security Department, Olympia, WA

Contributors:

Safeco Insurance Company of America, Seattle, WA

Seattle/King County Private Industry Council, Seattle, WA

SPSS, INC., Chicago, IL

The Interdisciplinary Design Partnership

Consultant:	*Area of Expertise:*	*Affiliation:*
Burt Barnow	Labor Economics	ICF, INC., Washington, D.C.
David Grembowski	Planning	University of Washington, Seattle, WA
Terry Johnson	Labor Economics	Battelle Memorial Institute, Seattle, WA
Brian O'Sullivan	Planning	Seattle/King County Private Industry Council, Seattle, WA
Carl Simpson	Sociology	Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA
Bonnie and David Snedeker	Management	Snedeker Scientific, Inc., Seattle, WA
Ernst Stromsdorfer	Labor Economics	Washington State University, Pullman, WA

The Advisory Partnership

The National Advisory Committee:

State of California: Tim Taormina
San Francisco SDA: Greg Marutani

State of Kansas: Richard Hernandez
Pittsburg SDA: John Gobetz

State of Massachusetts: Kay Stratton
New Bedford SDA: Paul Vigeant

State of New York: Robert Bernstein
Dunkirk PIC: Bruce Ritenberg III

State of Texas: Rick Mackay
Fort Worth PIC: Judge Michael Moncrief

State of Washington: Ernest La Palm
Seattle/King County PIC: Al Starr

Additional Advisors to the Project:

National Governors Association: Kay Albright, Washington, D.C.

HRDI: AFL-CIO: Candace Brown, Helena, MT

U.S. Department of Labor: Hugh Davies, Washington, D.C.

National Association of Counties: Kathy DuChene, Washington D.C.

State of Ohio Impact Assessment Unit: Gail James, Columbus, OH

Berkeley Planning Associates: Deborah Kogan, Berkeley, CA

Abt Associates: Jeff Zornitsky, Cambridge, MA

Special appreciation is expressed to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Employment Security Department, Isiah Turner and Ernest La Palm, for supporting the need for evaluation at the state and local level and intitiating this project to address that need. They provided the strong encouragement and the resources necessary for designing the project, seeking a funding base for carrying it out and coordinating its development.

Other individuals made unique contributions to the development of the project: John Wallace and Ann Donohue of the National Commission for Employment Policy; Kay Albright of the National Governors Association; Dan Kelly of IBM's Corporate Support Program and Jim Ward of IBM's Olympia, WA office; Mark Cooper of the Safeco Insurance Company; and Steve Ballowe of SPSS, Inc.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Washington State Employment Security Department for its sponsorship of this planning guide. Project coordinators Gary Bodeutsch and Ann Blalock have been unfailingly supportive of my efforts in producing this piece. Ann played an essential role in advising, editing and generally acting as a sounding board throughout the development of the guide. Gary put in long hard hours working on the formatting of the piece. Their calm advice and characteristic good humor have sustained us all.

I would like to thank the consultants in the agency's Training Program Services Division—Martin McCallum, Chris Webster, and Ross Wiggins—and also Ginnie Beane, for their support and assistance.

Other project participants willingly shared their knowledge and experience, sensitizing me to some of the special issues involved in evaluating JTPA programs. My thanks go to project consultant David Grembowski and to Kay Albright of the National Governors Association, who went above and beyond the call of colleagual duty in providing me with materials and answering my many questions. I would also like to thank Brian O'Sullivan and Bonnie Snedeker of the Seattle/King County Private Industry Council, and members of the project's National Advisory Committee for their valuable input.

Finally I wish to thank Peter Spinney and Faith Conlon for acting as outside reviewers.

Deborah Feldman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTEXT OF THE VOLUME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO JTPA EVALUATION

1. CHOOSING TO EVALUATE 3
2. REVIEWING JTPA EVALUATION MATERIALS AND OPTIONS 11

SECTION TWO: PRELIMINARY PLANNING ISSUES

3. ASSESSING EVALUABILITY AND BUILDING IN UTILITY 27
4. UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT 39

SECTION THREE: TOWARDS A JTPA EVALUATION PLAN

5. FORMULATING EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND A RESEARCH DESIGN 57
6. DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN 67
7. ESTIMATING EVALUATION COSTS AND BENEFITS 83

SECTION FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

8. COLLECTING AND USING DATA 95
9. FUNDING A JTPA EVALUATION 105
10. STAFFING A JTPA EVALUATION 121

CONCLUSION 137

REFERENCES 139

APPENDIX 145

INTRODUCTION

While this planning guide may be used independently, it is designed to supplement a set of evaluation guides in the series titled JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. The companion volumes to this guide address specific JTPA evaluation research issues. This guide recognizes that technical research tools are not always all that is needed in carrying out a successful JTPA evaluation effort. Local JTPA practitioners have a host of practical concerns about evaluation, ranging from how to promote evaluation as a worthwhile activity to how to hire a good consultant. The primary purpose of this guide is to address these more practical concerns about planning and carrying out JTPA evaluation, concerns which cross-cut the various evaluation approaches described in the companion volumes.

This guide begins with some thoughts about the nature, purposes and value of JTPA program evaluation. While students of evaluation may find little new here, the ideas presented may be helpful to the non-specialist or to administrative decision-makers who need to know more about evaluation before they can support it within their organization. The introductory portion of the guide is also designed to familiarize the reader with the various evaluation materials available through the several volumes comprising JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. From this preliminary section the reader should come away with a sense of how all these materials fit together and how they may be used to conduct various kinds of JTPA evaluations at the SDA level.

The middle portion of this guide (Sections Two and Three) develops an overall planning context for carrying out JTPA evaluation. As much as possible, planning issues are presented within a roughly sequential framework. The framework begins with an examination of what is organizationally possible (what are the organizational supports for and constraints to evaluation) and ends with an assessment of evaluation costs and benefits.

Some areas of evaluation planning are less amenable to assignment and discussion within a sequential framework. The final chapters of this guide (Section Four) are devoted to important resource planning topics which deserve separate treatment. Those topics include funding concerns, staffing needs and options, and data collection issues.

In producing this guide, the assumption is that the potential audience of JTPA administrators, practitioners and evaluators is wide-ranging in terms of technical background and information needs. Such a guide always runs the risk of being too simplified for some and too cursory for others. As much as possible, this guide adheres to a middle course: It examines the basic evaluation planning and implementation issues within the specific context of JTPA, but in honoring the diversity of its readers' interests and needs it does not offer a detailed course of action for every planning step. Readers seeking more information or detail on a topic can refer to supplemental sources of information in the final references section.

A parallel evaluation planning guide for state JTPA practitioners is available through the JTPA Evaluation Design Project. While the structure and content of the two guides is similar, the focus of this second guide is on state JTPA evaluation issues and concerns. Some local practitioners may also be interested in this additional perspective on JTPA evaluation.

Much of the background information for the guide was collected through interviews and informal discussions with numerous federal, state and local JTPA practitioners, administrators, and evaluators. Almost all of the specific examples of evaluation experiences and activities are derived from these important informants.

SECTION 1
AN INTRODUCTION TO JTPA EVALUATION

These first chapters are addressed to a broad audience of JTPA administrators and practitioners who must decide whether or not to evaluate and how to evaluate JTPA. The first chapter tackles the question "Why evaluate?", setting forth some specific rationales for evaluating JTPA programs at the state level. In addressing the concern "How should we evaluate?" the second chapter describes the various JTPA evaluation materials and approaches contained in the set of volumes this guide accompanies.

CHAPTER 1
CHOOSING TO EVALUATE

What Is Evaluation?
Evaluation vs. Monitoring
Evaluation Approaches
How can JTPA benefit from evaluation?

CHAPTER 1. CHOOSING TO EVALUATE

INTRODUCTION

JTPA decision-makers at the service delivery area (SDA) level face tough choices in allocating scarce program resources. JTPA administrative monies are restricted and no federal funds have been specially earmarked for SDA evaluation initiatives. As a result, evaluation activities must compete for recognition against other worthy program investment choices. If evaluation is to be incorporated into the SDA program agenda, JTPA administrators and policy-makers must be convinced that evaluation, as a program investment, yields significant management returns. This chapter introduces the concept of evaluation and argues the merits of incorporating evaluation activities into JTPA programs.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

This volume is about planning and carrying out JTPA evaluation activities. Since "evaluation" has come to mean different things to different users and has often been loosely applied to any program assessment activity, we first must define the term. As it is used in this guide, evaluation refers to the systematic collection, analysis and reporting of information on a particular set of program activities and outcomes that decision-makers wish to know more about.

Encompassing a variety of research methods, evaluation seeks to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of a given program. Effectiveness concerns the extent to which a program, through various treatments or service interventions has met its intended goals.[1] As outlined in legislation, the three principle goals of JTPA are to (1) increase stable employment, (2) increase earnings, and (3) reduce welfare dependency of economically disadvantaged and dislocated workers. In the JTPA context, then, a central question evaluation poses is "how effectively are programs contributing to changes in employment, earnings and welfare status of the intended target group?"

By efficiency, we mean how well a program has used available resources to achieve its intended goals. In determining the efficiency of JTPA program efforts, evaluation activities might focus on the various costs and benefits of the program and how such measures compare with those of other JTPA program strategies. Since in most state settings, JTPA resources are terribly limited, determining what is an efficient use of those resources is a particularly relevant undertaking.

While concepts of efficiency and effectiveness are interrelated, the one does not necessarily follow the other. A program may be tremendously efficient, yet not terribly effective, and vice-versa. For example, a JTPA program may be quite cost-efficient in placing a large number of participants, but the program's true impact (effectiveness) may actually be negligible; the participants may have done just as well on their own without the program.

Evaluation and JTPA

In measuring efficiency and effectiveness, evaluation can consider both JTPA program processes and outcomes. As illustrated below, outcome evaluations focus on the end benefits derived from program activities; process evaluations focus on the activities themselves:

---

[1] Not everyone subscribes to a goal-oriented basis for evaluation. See Scriven, "Pros and Cons of Goal Free Evaluation." Evaluation Comment, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Dec., 1972), pp. 1-4.

OUTCOME VS. PROCESS EVALUATIONS

Evaluation Type	Questions Asked
Outcome	Did JTPA participants benefit from the program? What kind of benefits were derived? Which participants benefitted most?
Process	How was the program implemented? Which program elements contributed to or detracted from achievement of program goals?

Together process and outcome evaluations can provide a wide range of information to PIC members, SDA administrators, and program staff, allowing them to make more informed judgments about their programs. More specifically, comprehensive evaluation can inform these decision-makers in two ways: decision-makers (1) can better discern to what extent major legislative goals for JTPA are or are not achieved and (2) can more fully understand how JTPA programs operate in order to better meet program goals and improve compliance with performance standards.

Evaluation vs. Monitoring

Sometimes evaluation is treated as if it were an elaborate extension of program monitoring activities. However, the evaluation process, while often utilizing data collected by a monitoring system, can be viewed as conceptually distinct from monitoring. Within the overall JTPA planning, management and policy framework, evaluation and monitoring activities should ask different questions and serve different purposes. As discussed above, evaluation poses questions about how efficiently and effectively JTPA program goals are being met or how they might be better met in the future. A useful evaluation permits decision-makers to make judgments about the value of JTPA programs (or particular JTPA program aspects).

In contrast, monitoring is not concerned with program impact, but with program compliance. (Does this program comply with fiscal and programmatic requirements set forth in legislation, regulations and procedures manuals?) The ongoing assessment of program compliance is an essential component in effective JTPA management and planning. However, judgments of program compliance cannot substitute for judgments of program value; only evaluation can inform the latter.

Evaluation Research Approaches and Methods

Evaluation activities encompass a variety of research approaches and methods. Two broad categories of evaluation--inquiry focused on program outcomes vs. inquiry focused on program processes--have already been mentioned. The following chapter examines both process and outcome approaches to evaluating JTPA programs in more detail so that the reader can appreciate the several evaluation options offered in the companion guides to this volume.

Because the information needs addressed by evaluation are so varied, evaluation research methods are necessarily broad. JTPA evaluation research activities can range from exploratory case studies to more rigorous quasi-experimental research. Depending on the research design selected, the information to be collected can run the gamut from strictly quantitative data (such as might be incorporated into the MIS) to the more qualitative or impressionistic data gleaned from open-ended interviews. The JTPA evaluation guides which accompany this volume offer several distinct and detailed research designs for examining different aspects of JTPA.

Whatever evaluation approach is used, evaluation ideally should be a learning process which allows JTPA policy-makers, program administrators and staff to better understand and improve their programs.

HOW CAN JTPA BENEFIT FROM EVALUATION?

We have described the general purpose behind any program evaluation: it is to learn more about the efficiency and effectiveness of a program so that it may be improved. To complete the answer to "why evaluate

JTPA?" we conclude with five more specific arguments for evaluating JTPA.

1. **Evaluation as a Mechanism for Accountability**
   With shrinking public resources have come increasing demands for viable methods to ensure that program funds are being wisely spent. A program's worth must be demonstrated not only to elected officials and the taxpaying public, but also to users of program services and their advocates. Evaluation offers a rational management tool for examining the value of JTPA programs and ensuring accountability to these interested parties.

   The language of fiscal accountability is built into JTPA legislation (Job training is an "investment" in social capital), but evaluation is not limited to answering questions about the fiscal costs and benefits of JTPA. Evaluation also speaks to questions of equity. If JTPA is not targeting services to the people the legislation was designed to assist, equity is not being served. Evaluation, then, can be used as a tool to provide social as well as fiscal accountability to the public.

2. **Evaluation as a Planning and Management Tool**
   Increasingly, program operators are viewing evaluation as a management tool for improving decision-making. Under JTPA, SDA managers may face a full spectrum of administrative tasks, ranging from the SDA that primarily coordinates and oversees program activities to the SDA that designs, staffs, and carries out such activities. Whatever roles the SDA (and its PIC) may play, evaluation's utility can be direct and immediate. Evaluation may help to identify gaps and overlaps in program services, uncover special problems in service delivery, and answer basic questions about the effectiveness of various programmatic strategies. Moreover, evaluation results may guide decisions about the distribution of scarce resources among competing program demands.

3. **Evaluation as a Policy Tool**
   Evaluation can offer more long-range benefits by informing PIC members and other policy-makers about areas of program implementation and program accomplishments that are of importance to them. When used as such a policy tool, evaluation can lay the foundation for better, more innovative policy approaches to service delivery.

   What are JTPA policy concerns? While each local setting is unique, all policy-makers must generally be concerned with whether JTPA programs are responsive to the Act's purposes and local needs. Are more specific policies needed to enhance service provider coordination? Encourage certain kinds of innovative efforts? Better serve target populations? Encourage more quality placements? Evaluation is a mechanism for answering these and other policy questions so that decision-makers can make more informed judgments about JTPA.

4. Evaluation as an Educative Process

In a general sense, evaluation is intrinsically an educative process because the goal of every evaluation involves increased understanding of a program on the part of someone--program operators, planners, administrators, policy-makers, the public. However, evaluation may also be an educative process in a more specialized sense by providing an organized way for people on the front lines of service delivery to share what they do with other concerned parties and vice-versa.

This kind of information sharing is particularly important in a complex, multi-layered service delivery system as is found in the more decentralized JTPA programs (i.e., where service delivery is contracted out). For example, the rich and complex results of a process evaluation may allow PIC members, elected officials, state administrators and the public to more directly grasp the complexities of effectively managing an employment and training program. Those outside service delivery can gain a better appreciation for the difficulties in delivering JTPA services, given the resource constraints, coordination demands and organizational obstacles many service providers face. Similarly, evaluation offers state administrative staff and SDAs an opportunity to communicate more effectively with each other about their separate concerns.

5. Evaluation as a Tool for Moving Beyond Performance Standards

From its inception, JTPA has focused attention on one type of performance assessment: performance standards. Since the standards are mandated and are to be uniformly applied across states and their SDAs (unless states choose to develop their own regression model for performance standards), why be concerned about other assessment measures which are not so explicitly called for in legislation? Evaluation tools are a necessary complement to performance measures for several reasons:

- Evaluation Helps Explain Performance.
  Consistently low performance outcomes or inconsistent outcomes may clue us in that there is a problem, but tell us little about what is influencing such performance. Performance standards do not tell us what is or is not an effective program element. To answer these kinds of questions, we may use a process evaluation to systematically examine specific program factors.

- Evaluation Looks at Distributive Outcomes.
  High or low performance outcomes may mask other less obvious distributive outcomes for clients. Who is really being served by JTPA? Is it the intended target group? Are clients receiving truly beneficial services and placements? Evaluation can directly address these distributive issues; performance measurements can do so only in a limited fashion.

- Evaluation Measures Program Impacts.
  Performance measures alone cannot answer the important question "Did the program have an impact in giving people

durable jobs, increasing their earnings and reducing their vulnerability to poverty?" While a given program may boast a 70% placement rate, we have no idea if the program's efforts were truly responsible for those placements or whether, in fact, participants would have gotten the same jobs even if they had not participated in JTPA. Performance outcomes need to be supplemented with other evaluation techniques that help sort out extraneous influences from the true effects of the program itself. In some instances, evaluation may reveal that a program with low performance measures is still very effective because it significantly impacts a target group of difficult-to-serve clients who, without the program, would otherwise not have been successfully trained and placed.

CONCLUSION

Congress intended JTPA to be a "performance-driven system" in which the program's measured accomplishments in training and placing participants would be the hallmark of program success.

In such a decentralized federal setting, it makes sense to develop national performance standards and reporting requirements to ensure a measure of program accountability to federal authorities. But successful compliance with one's assigned numerical goals is only one source for judging the value of a program. Every SDA has its own set of problems, concerns and information needs particular to its local setting which are not necessarily addressed through performance standards ratings. Evaluation offers other important sources of information which help JTPA decision-makers to see the complexity of the program and to make more accurate assessments of its true impact on participants. Armed with such information, those decision-makers are then in a better position to develop strategies for further program improvement.

What evaluation course make sense for an SDA to pursue in order to capture the benefits of evaluation described in the preceding pages? The following chapter delves further into the specific kinds of evaluation approaches and options available through additional guides in the set Evaluating JTPA at the State and Local Level.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEWING JTPA EVALUATION MATERIALS AND OPTIONS

What Evaluation Materials Are Available?

What Is a Gross Impact Evaluation?

What Is a Net Impact Evaluation?

What Is a Process Evaluation?

How do These Evaluation Approaches Complement Each Other?

CHAPTER 2.

REVIEWING JTPA EVALUATION MATERIALS AND OPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

With the passage of JTPA in 1982, Congress created a new legislative context for planning and implementing this country's employment and training programs. The new context includes a much enhanced administrative and planning role for state government while allowing for a fair amount of policy and program initiative at the local level.

Federal administrataive responsibilities, including evaluation, have dramatically receded. Previously, the federal government formulated evaluation policy, funded new evaluation research efforts and disseminated findings. Now states and SDAs must take on new oversight responsibilities, having relatively little experience in evaluation policy-making, design and implementation. The materials described here are part of a research effort to assist SDAs and states in carrying out these new roles and responsibilities.

THE JTPA EVALUATION DESIGN PROJECT

This planning guide is one in a series of related evaluation materials produced by the JTPA Evaluation Design Project.[2] In this chapter we will briefly describe the Project's purposes and orientation, present the various materials available through the project and outline how JTPA administrators, planners and policy-makers can effectively use these materials.

A primary purpose of the project is to create evaluation materials which are useful to states and SDAs in planning and carrying out JTPA evaluation activities. A secondary purpose is to develop several model evaluation strategies which, when applied across states and SDAs, can produce comparable information. If SDAs, for example, use a consistent research strategy for assessing JTPA program implementation, the lessons learned from such a process evaluation are more likely to have broader significance, informing policy-makers at the federal and state, as well as local level.

---

[2] For a synopsis of the Project and its funders and participants, see the Preface.

WHAT EVALUATION MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE?

In order to meet different users' needs, the evaluation materials developed by the project consist of a set of complementary volumes on JTPA evaluation entitled JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. These volumes can be used independently or in conjunction with each other. The set of materials described in this chapter includes the following volumes:

Volume I:	Overview
Volume II:	A General Planning Guide
Volume III:	A Guide for Process Evaluations
Volume IV:	A Guide for Gross Impact Evaluations
Volume V:	A Guide for Net Impact Evaluations [3]
Volume VI:	An Implementation Guide for Net Impact Evaluations
Volume VII:	Issues Related to Net Impact Evaluation a. Issues in Evaluating Costs and Benefits b. The Debate Over Experimental Vs. Quasi-Experimental Design
Volume VIII:	MIS Issues in Evaluating JTPA

This set of volumes is designed to offer state and local level users a fairly selective, yet comprehensive menu of technical assistance products to meet a variety of evaluation needs. Taken together, these products support comprehensive evaluations over the JTPA biennial planning cycle. However, users may also wish to selectively choose from this menu in order to meet particular evaluation interests, needs and resources. To give a sense of the utility and scope of these materials, the various volumes are briefly described as follows.

---

[3] Because of its cost and research requirements, the net impact approach is most likely to be used at the state level. However, some large SDAs or consortium of SDAs, perhaps in conjunction with state evaluation activities, may also wish to explore net impacts of JTPA. For this reason, the description of net impact has been included here.

Overview (Volume I)

This summary volume outlines the materials comprising the set of volumes JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. In condensed form, it covers the specific evaluation questions, research issues and methodological concerns addressed in each of the companion guides in the total series.

A General Planning Guide (Volume II)

This volume provides an overview of the various evaluation tools available in Volumes III through VII and how these tools may be used in a complementary fashion. Additionally, the volume focuses on practical planning and implementation issues that cross-cut various evaluation designs, such as how to develop the organizational capability for evaluation and how evaluation activities at the state level might be planned, funded and carried out. Both a state and a local version of this guide are available.

A Guide for Process Evaluations (Volume III)
A Guide for Gross Impact Evaluations (Volume IV)
A Guide for Net Impact Evaluations (Volume V)

These analysis guides present three distinct approaches and related methodologies for analyzing and carrying out JTPA program evaluation. (A specific discussion of the uses and complementary interaction of these designs follow later in this chapter.) Each guide contains these components.

1. A **framework** for analyzing either JTPA program activities (process evaluation) or outcomes (net and gross impact evaluations), including the specific types of evaluation issues each approach addresses and the kinds of variables, measurements and data sources each approach requires.

2. A **discussion of research methodology**, including:

   - A recommended research design approach for answering a key set of evaluation questions.

   - A description of data collection and analysis methods covering potential pitfalls, problems and possibilities, including recommendations for the use of MIS data elements and other data bases, where relevant.

3. An **appendix** to the guide providing additional references and/or technical information relating to each approach.

Each of these analysis guides may be used independently, in conjunction with each other, or with Volume VII and VIII. To the degree possible, the guides present information in a straight-forward, non-technical fashion[4] in an effort to make the presentation accessible to a wide audience of potential users. The development of these products has also been influenced by project concerns that the materials be attuned to evaluation issues of greatest interest to users, be realistically implementable in terms of research cost and complexity, and be committed to scientifically sound research strategies.

---

[4] Because of the research design requirements of the net impact approach, the net impact evaluation guide, of necessity, contains more technical information than the other two guides.

An Implementation Manual for Net Impact Evaluations (Volume VI)

The volume on net impact evaluations is sufficiently technical, because of the statistical methods involved, that this practical manual accompanies it.

Issues Related to Net Impact Evaluation (Volume VII)

- **Issues in Evaluating Costs and Benefits**
- **The Debate over Experimental Vs. Quasi-Experimental Design**

This first issue paper describes the rationale and procedures for estimating JTPA program costs, showing how costs and benefits are related in a human capital investment framework. The second paper examines the pros and cons of two different net impact research strategies.

MIS Issues in Evaluating JTPA (Volume VIII)

This issue paper is designed to assist users in better understanding how JTPA and other employment and training management information systems can efficiently support evaluation.

Which of these analysis tools will best serve the evaluation needs and capabilities of an individual SDA? Given various resource constraints, which kind of evaluation approach should take priority? The answer depends in large measure on the kinds of policy priorities your state and PIC have established and the evaluation questions of greatest relevance to local JTPA planners, administrators, and policy-makers.

The remainder of the chapter outlines the principle features of the three major evaluation approaches, the strengths and limitations of each approach and the key questions about JTPA programs each addresses. We begin with a look at evaluations which focus on outcomes.

WHAT IS A GROSS IMPACT EVALUATION?

In general, evaluations of the outcomes of a program are designed to analyze various short-term and long-term accomplishments in the context of the program's stated goals. Outcome evaluations, as the name implies, focus on the end products of the program--in this case, measures of those employed, their wages, their status with respect to the welfare system, and program costs. (Other outcomes can also be measured: additional client outcomes, employer outcomes, or more general societal outcomes, such as taxpayer dollars saved). Program outcome measures, taken by themselves, (without comparing them to outcomes for similar individuals who do not receive JTPA-like services) can be considered gross outcomes.

Gross impact evaluation provides a systematic way to describe post-program outcomes and to analyze how service delivery alternatives influence them. The gross impact approach can be used at the state level to study outcomes across SDAs or at the local level to study outcomes within a single SDA.[5] The distinctive feature of a gross impact evaluation is its exclusive focus on outcomes related to program participants: there is no comparison or control group of non-participants to provide a yardstick against which overall program outcomes may be assessed.

Because no untreated control group is utilized, the gross impact evaluation cannot explain participant outcomes in terms of the program's efficacy. In using this approach to evaluate JTPA programs, we do not know to what extent the outcomes are the product of other external influences, such as changes in the economy, varying client characteristics, client use of non-JTPA training and educational programs or chance. In other words, we cannot differentiate between impacts caused by the program and results that would have occurred in its absence.

While unable to address the singular impact of JTPA programs, the gross impact approach offers some distinct advantages:

- The research design may be less complex and easier to implement than a net impact design.
- The approach offers a fairly quick turnaround time for information results.

---

[5] Providing the SDA's client base is large enough to create a sufficient study sample. Volume IV discusses sample size and other research considerations for state and local users.

- A wide range of key variables may be measured, allowing for a richer understanding of the program's performance.

- The relative impacts of different service strategies may be assessed.

Most importantly, in addition to the above-mentioned characteristics, the gross impact evaluation provides a framework for answering key questions about service delivery strategies, program types and employer and trainee post-program experiences with JTPA. In turn, these answers may inform policy-making and program planning at both the state and local level. Some of the central questions a gross impact evaluation can address are framed below:

GROSS IMPACT EVALUATION QUESTIONS

General Follow-Up: What is the overall picture of participant employment, wages, and welfare status at some distinct time period after termination? How does the picture change at three months, six months, nine months?

Employer Outcomes: How do JTPA trainees impact employers? To what degree does employer participation in JTPA raise or lower company turnover rate, affect training time, supervision or hiring?

Comparison of Treatments:* Which treatment strategies (e.g., long-term vs. short-term, OJT vs. classroom training) have more positive outcomes relative to other treatment strategies?

Comparison of Treatments Across Different Client Groups: * Which treatment strategies are most effective for different client sub-populations, relative to other treatment strategies?

Quality of Placements: Do post-program jobs for JTPA clients resemble primary, as opposed to lower quality, secondary labor market positions? Are positions training-related?

* Note: The methodology used in the guide to answer this question is referred to as "differential gross impact analysis."

While a gross impact evaluation can answer questions about the relative merits of different JTPA program components, to find out about the true effectiveness of JTPA we have to turn to a different kind of outcome evaluation, the net impact evaluation.

WHAT IS A NET IMPACT EVALUATION?

In contrast to gross impact, a net impact evaluation attempts to sort out specific program impacts from other influencing factors. A net impact evaluation more precisely answers the question "was the program effective?" by analyzing the extent to which outcomes were due specifically to program treatments rather than to other factors, such as participant characteristics or the environment in which the program operates.

Of necessity, a net impact evaluation approach requires a complex theoretical base and may require a larger sample size than the gross impact evaluation. The hallmark of the net impact research design is the inclusion of a comparison group of non-participants whose performance establishes a baseline against which JTPA client outcomes may be judged. The question, then, really becomes "Do JTPA clients do significantly better in the labor market than non-participants with similar economic and educational profiles?"

Some potential limitations of the net impact evaluation are its greater design complexity and special data requirements: data elements required from non-JTPA sources may be difficult to access or unavailable. In most cases, the evaluation will be limited to the study of a small set of key variables and outcomes.[6] However, as a balance to these limitations, the net impact design offers a powerful evaluation tool--a tool that allows us to identify more direct causal links between JTPA service and client outcomes, thus permitting stronger policy conclusions.

---

[6] The net impact approach developed in this series uses a quasi-experimental design, as opposed to a true experimental design. Comparison group members are statistically matched to the experimental group of self-selected JTPA participants rather than all participants being randomly assigned to either group. Thus, this net impact approach must make additional validity assumptions about what is being measured. These additional assumptions may be viewed as a limitation imbedded within the design.

In assessing the effectiveness of JTPA, a state or SDA may wish to know not only how effective JTPA is in general, but also how effective different program strategies are for various client subgroups. Some additional questions which a net impact evaluation of JTPA can address include:

NET IMPACT EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Which program types have a greater impact on client earnings?
- Is long-term training more effective than short-term?
- Are multi-strategy program approaches more likely to have a greater impact than single strategy programs?
- Do some client groups benefit more from certain types of training than other client groups?

WHAT IS A PROCESS EVALUATION?

By definition, outcome evaluations tell us primarily about program results. Examination of the factors which contribute to or help explain those results is more the province of process evaluations.[7]

Is a JTPA program underperforming because of the services provided to clients or because of the way services are delivered? In order to provide insights into why a program is achieving particular results, a process evaluation illuminates the organizational manner in which the program is carried out. How are services assigned to target populations? How are client flows organized? How are program functions carried out and inter-program coordination accomplished? In responding to these sorts of questions, a process evaluation can reveal important influences that program implementation factors have on program outcomes.

---

[7] Also sometimes referred to as implementation studies or formative evaluation.

For example, how an SDA organizes its outreach and intake procedures may intentionally or unintentionally affect which kinds of clients enter the JTPA system and what kinds of services they receive--the selection procedures ultimately shaping employment, earnings and welfare savings. At the state level, a JTPA process evaluation will attempt to sift out those administrative and coordination arrangements which appear to have the most influence on the nature and quality of service provision, identifying which arrangements are contributing to goal achievement and which are inhibiting it.

With the possible exception of single SDA states, JTPA implementation encompasses two separate but interrelated organizational levels, the state administrative level and the local service delivery level. Therefore, process evaluation at the two levels will be distinct from each other (although state decision-makers may be concerned with assessing implementation at both levels), posing different questions about implementation of JTPA. Some of the key questions posed by the state level and SDA level process evaluations are framed below:

PROCESS EVALUATION QUESTIONS

State Level Process Evaluation	SDA Level Process Evaluation
How are state JTPA policies being formulated and implemented?	What are the service goals of the SDA? Do these goals mesh with state employment and training goals? With JTPA goals?
How are state policies and procedures affecting JTPA service delivery?	How are service delivery arrangements affecting who receives services?
How might communication and coordination between state agencies, states and SDAs, and states and federal JTPA administrators be improved?	Are certain service delivery arrangements supporting or inhibiting achievement of JTPA goals or particular state and SDA goals?

In answering these kinds of questions about JTPA organizational arrangements, the process evaluation must rely on a number of data sources, including less quantifiable data gathered from observation and interviews. As a result, the inferences drawn from the data may be more subjective in nature. However, providing the evaluators have sufficient understanding of the given JTPA program context and sufficient neutrality and distance from the program itself, process information can provide valuable insights into the program's strengths and weaknesses.

HOW DO THESE THREE APPROACHES COMPLEMENT ONE ANOTHER?

While each of these evaluation approaches have been treated thus far as free-standing, they are designed to be used in a complementary fashion over the JTPA biennial planning cycle. In combination, these various evaluation approaches offer more powerful analytic tools for understanding and improving JTPA. (For an overview of the three evaluation types, see the following page.) Here are some ways in which these tools can interact:

- Process Evaluations Make Impact Findings More Meaningful. If outcome measures suggest a particular program performed well, administrators and planners will want to know what factors contributed to the program's success. The outcome measures of net and gross impact studies are of limited utility if factors contributing to that success cannot be described or duplicated by others. In helping to answer the question "what worked?", a process evaluation fills an important information gap. Similarly, where outcome measures indicate poor program performance, a process evaluation can help decipher the reasons for inadequate performance and suggest changes for improvement.

- Gross Impact Evaluation May Help to Focus or Enrich a Process Evaluation. Often resource and time limitations dictate that a process evaluation be limited in scope to those elements or processes which are most likely to yield interesting and useful information. Data collected on gross outcomes may help pinpoint the focus of a process evaluation more precisely to the most productive areas of inquiry.

- Gross and Net Impact Evaluations May Interact and Inform Each Other in Important Ways. Although both gross and net evaluation approaches may be used to compare outcomes for different client subgroups and different service categories, the gross impact evaluation allows for a more wide-ranging analysis of specific JTPA treatments and policies not possible (because of time, resource or data constraints) with the net impact approach. The quick turnaround descriptions furnished by the gross impact approach may help provide clues suggesting the reasons for particular net impact findings.

OVERVIEW OF PROCESS, GROSS IMPACT AND NET IMPACT EVALUATIONS

PROCESS EVALUATION	GROSS IMPACT EVALUATION	NET IMPACT EVALUATION
A tool for studying the way JTPA is being implemented, and the influence implementation processes are having on client outcomes.	A tool for studying gross outcomes for clients and employers: For all clients; for different client groups; for clients receiving different service interventions.	A tool for studying the net impact of the program on clients: For all clients; for clients receiving different service interventions; for different client groups—utilizing a comparison group to control for non-program influences on outcomes.
QUESTIONS ASKED: How are the major implementation characteristics of the program (which are expected to produce positive outcomes) influencing outcomes? Are they working as planned?	QUESTIONS ASKED: What are post program outcomes for clients (and employers) who experience JTPA? What service strategies produce the most positive outcomes relative to all other strategies?	QUESTIONS ASKED: Of the key outcomes in the legislation, which outcomes can be attributed to JTPA, rather than to other influences or to chance? What service strategies are most effective for which subgroups of clients?
BENEFITS OF THE INFORMATION: Often it is the program's features that are affecting outcomes more than the services provided. Process information helps the user pinpoint the differential effects of service treatments vs. the way the program is being carried out.	BENEFITS OF THE INFORMATION: States and SDAs can track the kinds of outcomes that characterize different groups given different services, without collecting information on a comparison group.	BENEFITS OF THE INFORMATION: The user can sort out which outcomes are due to the service interventions, rather than to other causes. Consequently, the user has a measure of return on the investment.
LIMITATIONS OF THE INFORMATION: Process information is often difficult to quantify, and therefore the inferences are more subjective. Nevertheless significant clues to relationships between processes and and outcomes are possible.	LIMITATIONS OF THE INFORMATION: In interpreting the information, we can not attribute any of the outcomes to the program itself. We can only say that the outcomes are occurring, due to a potential range of influences, one of which is the program.	LIMITATIONS OF THE INFORMATION: Because of data availability, only a small set of key outcomes can be studied.
DISTINCTIVE FEATURE: The user can identify those elements of implementation that are contributing to goal achievement, or inhabiting it.	DISTINCTIVE FEATURE: The user can obtain information on a rich range of outcomes for both clients and JTPA employers, not available through the net impact model.	DISTINCTIVE FEATURE: Policy makers can more truly judge the effectiveness of JTPA programs and service strategies.

The wider array of outcome measures in the gross impact approach may be merged with net impact data and used to help explain net impact findings. For example, gross outcome measures may include information on quality of placement and the job satisfaction of the JTPA client. Linking such measures to net impact findings may help answer questions about the relationship between quality of placement and long-term earnings or job retention.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the various evaluation tools contained in the set of guides entitled JTPA Evaluation at the State and Local Level. While each guide may be used independently, the guides are designed to complement one another; taken as a totality they offer a comprehensive view of JTPA evaluation issues and approaches. In particular, the three major evaluation approaches designated as net impact, gross impact and process can interact and inform each other in significant ways. Setting aside for a moment concerns about choosing an evaluation approach (or approaches), we now examine some preliminary evaluation issues which cross-cut the various approaches.

SECTION 2
PRELIMINARY PLANNING ISSUES

The following chapters cover some preliminary planning issues to be considered early on in a JTPA evaluation planning effort. While these issues are presented within an overall temporal framework, they do not translate easily into a set of discrete sequential planning steps to be set down in a guide. Rather, the planning issues, which for clarity's sake are discussed here under separate category headings, in actual practice blend and overlap extensively with one another. These early evaluation considerations have long-range implications for the planning and implementation work that occurs at later stages. While these chapters do not offer a defined set of planning steps, they contain numerous strategy considerations, check-lists, and suggestions for beginning the JTPA evaluation process.

CHAPTER 3
ASSESSING EVALUABILITY AND BUILDING IN UTILITY

What Kind of Evaluation Is Feasible?
Evaluability Assessment
Factors Affecting Evaluability
Improving Program Evaluability
Will the Evaluation be Utilized?
Barriers to Utilization
Increasing Evaluation's Utility and Utilization

CHAPTER 3.

ASSESSING EVALUABILITY AND BUILDING IN UTILITY

INTRODUCTION

Even before specific evaluation questions are delineated or an evaluation approach settled upon, some important preliminary planning issues must be considered. This preliminary planning work revolves around three interrelated questions concerning the setting in which the evaluation occurs:

- **What kind of evaluation is feasible?**
- **To what extent will the evaluation be utilized?**
- **How does the organizational context impact evaluation?**

How these questions are dealt with will have long-range consequences for the implementation of the evaluation and its ultimate integrity as a useful planning, policy and management tool within JTPA. This chapter examines the first two questions; the following chapter continues with the third question.

WHAT KIND OF EVALUATION IS FEASIBLE?

Before fully embarking on an evaluation plan, evaluators should consider the feasibility of evaluating a particular JTPA program. Are some kinds of evaluation efforts more likely to succeed than others? Is the timing appropriate, or would an evaluation yield better results at a later date?

To answer these kinds of questions, Rutman and others suggest that evaluation planners begin with an "evaluability assessment"[8] of the program in question. Such a preliminary assessment will help an organization to:

- Define the appropriate scope and timing for an evaluation
- Avoid wasting time and planning efforts that will not produce useful results
- Identify barriers to evaluation that need to be removed before evaluation can take place
- Lay the groundwork for doing further evaluation planning when circumstances are more conducive to such efforts

Rutman has outlined in detail step-by-step procedures for assessing a program's evaluability. Some of the major points he and others have made are summarized here in terms of (1) technical factors; (2) program features; and (3) organizational factors affecting evaluability.

Technical Features Affecting Evaluability

Some of the most obvious barriers to doing solid, useful evaluation of JTPA programs are largely technical in nature. In later chapters, several of these technical issues concerning funding, staffing and managing JTPA evaluation efforts will be presented in greater detail. For clarity's sake, these technical concerns, as they touch on program evaluability, are briefly mentioned as follows:

- Financial Constraints: Are there sufficient funds to ensure the evaluation effort's successful completion? If not, can additional funds be obtained within an acceptable timeframe? A scaled down, but well- supported evaluation effort, providing quality information in a few key areas may prove to be the most useful interim option. (Chapter 9 discusses JTPA evaluation funding strategies further.)

---

[8] See, for example, Leonard Rutman, Planning Useful Evaluations: Evaluability Assessment, Sage Library of Social Research, Vol. 96 (Beverely Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980); Joseph S. Wholey, Evaluation: Promise and Performance (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1979); and Richard E. Schmidt, John Scanlon, and James B. Bell, Evaluability Assessment (Rockville, MD: Project SHARE, DHEW no.: 05-76-730, 1979).

- Staffing Constraints: In-house staffing of an evaluation effort is one way to overcome financial constraints, but if staff resources are stretched thin, this strategy may end up compromising the quality and usefulness of the evaluation. Alternatively, such constraints may encourage "creative leveraging" of both governmental and community resources heretofore untapped. (Overcoming staffing constraints is treated separately in Chapter 10.)

- Evaluation Timeframe: To be most useful, evaluation must be timely in answering the questions of chief interest to JTPA program administrators and policy-makers. If the timeframe for collecting and analyzing data is too liberal, evaluation findings may become stale and less relevant to decision-makers.

- Data Collection Problems: Insufficient data or inaccessible data may also delimit the nature and scope of an evaluation effort. (JTPA data collection issues are detailed in Chapter 8.)

Program Features Affecting Evaluability

Another set of factors affecting evaluability has to do with the contours of the program itself. While there may be no substantial technical barriers to conducting an evaluation, an employment and training program itself may exhibit certain characteristics which make evaluation outcomes more difficult to interpret and utilize effectively. Typically, a process (or implementation) study may be necessary to elucidate such features before larger-scale outcome evaluations are considered. Some of the characteristics affecting evaluability are as follows:

- Changing or Unfocused Goals: Explicit program goals provide a predetermined standard against which program processes and accomplishments can be measured. When an employment and training program's goals are unfocused or constantly changing, the task of evaluation is more difficult: how do you measure your achievements if you are not clear about what it is you are trying to achieve?

- Multiple and Conflicting Goals: Program goals may be well-defined, but inconsistent with each other, complicating the task of evaluation. For example, the goal of achieving a high placement rate at a low cost per placement often conflicts with other goals, such as significantly developing skill levels of participants or long-term retention of trainees in their placements. Such goal conflicts are inherent to many JTPA programs; the issue is not that of completely eliminating such conflicts (an impossible task!), but making the evaluation approach as sensitive as possible to such constraints on program outcomes. (A process evaluation may be needed to sort out how different program activities are supporting conflicting goals.)

- Variable Service Provision Strategies: When programs encompass numerous service provision strategies (as is the case in many JTPA program settings) or change strategies mid-stream, the task of evaluating becomes more challenging. The less uniform the overall treatments given, the more complicated the task of adequately accounting for program impacts.

- Small Program Size: The size of the program may also shape the nature and scope of evaluation. In the case of smaller, special JTPA projects or programs (for dislocated workers, older workers, etc.) impact findings may be of limited usefulness due to small sample problems or cost inefficiencies. (A fuller discussion of sample size requirements is found in the gross and net impact designs presented in Volumes IV and V.)

Organizational Factors Affecting Evaluability

Organizational factors often present the least tangible, but most powerful barriers to useful evaluation. Because of the central influence they have over evaluation activities, organizational concerns will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter. Some common organizational factors impacting evaluability are encapsulated below:

- Staffing Problems: When a program is plagued with low staff morale or high turnover, something is clearly wrong, but an evaluation may not help. Evaluation activities may create added burdens for the staff which they cannot handle. Effective staff are crucial in the operation of any social service program. An organization with serious staff problems will probably first need to focus its energy on rectifying those problems before being able to utilize broad evaluation findings.

- The History of Previous Evaluation: Have previous evaluations been done? If so, how have they been used? If the results have been ignored, is there any evidence to suggest that a new evaluation will receive any better reception? Alternatively, have evaluations been used to punish or undermine certain factions or personnel within the organization? If so, the credibility and usefulness of the new evaluation may be questioned and staff cooperation lost. Evaluation planners will have to develop some initial strategies to build up trust and credibility.

- Hidden Agendas: In some cases, the sponsor of the evaluation is not truly committed to an open inquiry into program operations from which the program can learn or improve. Instead the sponsor wants to use the evaluation to support a preconceived notion of the program as worthwhile or not worthwhile.
- Financial Difficulties: When a program is struggling to stay afloat financially, the utility of an evaluation is often severely curtailed. Administrative energy is necessarily focused on program survival rather than program improvement. The program may be able to take better advantage of evaluation findings when it is on a more stable financial footing.

- Inter- and Intra-Organizational Relations: Turf battles over clients, staff and other resources can compromise the evaluation effort. If for example, cooperative support among agencies is lacking, the evaluator may find access to important sources of information curtailed or delayed in ways that negatively impact the evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation planning effort will include strategies to ameliorate or compensate for difficult organizational relations.

Improving Program Evaluability

Some program attributes may impinge upon JTPA evaluation planning in ways that are difficult and/or costly to remediate right away. For example, the data limitations imposed by a particular MIS may be fairly rigid and uncompromising for evaluation plans in the near term. However, other limiting factors may be more amenable to change in favor of immediate evaluation needs.

An evaluability assessment is not intended to act as a discouragement to evaluation. Part of the assessment task is to help program operators determine what evaluability factors can be manipulated to enhance overall evaluability. Once those evaluability factors subject to influence are identified, evaluation staff can actively work with program administration and staff to create a program environment that is more receptive to evaluation. Staff can tackle not only technical evaluability factors such as data collection levels or methods, but also organizational factors such as program goal definition and interagency communication. Thus, the benefits of evaluability assessment extend beyond preparation for useful, feasible evaluations. An assessment encourages program examination and improvements important in their own right, apart from any evaluation activity to follow.

TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THE EVALUATION BE UTILIZED?

As the field of evaluation research develops, there is increasing concern over making such research more immediately useful to practitioners in the field. This concern is particularly underscored in the context of JTPA where limited administrative funds are available for evaluation activities. The feasibility of an evaluation and its usefulness are obviously intertwined, as the previous discussion on evaluability implies. The focus in this section is on increasing the usefulness of an evaluation, especially in terms of increasing the chances of its utilization. (Utility and utilization are not the same thing: an evaluation's results may be useful, in the abstract, but still not used.) The rest of this section looks at barriers to utilization of evaluation and presents suggestions for minimizing these barriers.

Barriers to Utilization

The previous section touched primarily on potential barriers to planning, conducting and interpreting the results of an evaluation. An evaluability assessment is also important in uncovering potential barriers to utilization, particularly barriers associated with organizational features of a program. What are some of these organizational barriers? While a fuller discussion of this question is reserved for the next chapter, the following outline provides a glimpse of common barriers to utilization.

UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS: SOME POTENTIAL BARRIERS

- Organizational inertia and resistance to change.
- Miscommunication between evaluators, those within the program being evaluated, and other potential users of the evaluation results.
- Misunderstandings about the purposes of an evaluation.
- Lack of organizational involvement in or commitment to the evaluation process.
- Failure to sufficiently connect the evaluation to other planning efforts.
- Overly lengthy timeframe for accomplishing evaluation.
- Unresolved tensions or conflicts between different organizational levels or branches of a program.
- Evaluation team perceived as lacking independence and neutrality.
- Evaluators lack credibility.
- Evaluation findings not clearly presented or adequately disseminated.

Increasing Evaluation's Utility and Utilization

Many evaluators are now playing a more activist role in ensuring the utilization of their findings by program administrators and others. Such a role demands that the evaluation group communicate and work more in concert with users from the earliest stages of evaluability assessment to the issuing of a final report. The following ten points summarize the kinds of steps an evaluator can take to build utility into the evaluation process from the very beginning.

1. Identify "stake-holders" and users of the evaluation.

The term "stake-holder"[9] refers to anyone who has a stake in the evaluation process and its results. Stake holders can include program funders, administrators, planners, policy-makers, front-line staff, clients and client-advocates. While not all of these groups may be directly involved in the evaluation process, it's important to know who these parties are and how their interests or concerns might affect the evaluation and its utility.

---

[9] The term "stakeholder" is taken from Carol Weiss, "Measuring the Likelihood of Influencing Decisions" in Evaluation Research Methods: A Basic Guide. Leonard Rutman, ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980. pp. 159-190.

2. Involve stake-holders in the planning process.
Where feasible, stake-holders who are potential users of the evaluation results need to be involved early on in the evaluation planning process (starting with evaluability assessment) for at least two major reasons. First, potential users have to be committed to the particular evaluation chosen and believe in its utility to JTPA program improvement. Participation in the planning process helps to build user understanding of and commitment to the evaluation effort. Second, user input helps focus the evaluation on the legitimate concerns and interests of the various users. The evaluation is more likely to produce information that critical actors in the program will want to use, as opposed to information that is of interest only to the evaluation staff.

3. Educate potential users.
One problem in basing evaluation around user input is that users' initial focus may be restricted to issues of immediate programmatic concern. For example, users at the SDA level may primarily be concerned with compliance and monitoring issues. While these concerns need to be addressed, evaluation planning can provide users the opportunity to explore broader evaluation options.

4. Focus evaluation on users' key questions.
Ultimately, the evaluation must yield information that users feel will be important to them in answering questions about JTPA programs. Achieving such a focus is not always easy because different users will bring to the planning process different perspectives as to what information is most useful and important to obtain.

5. Maintain neutrality and impartiality.
To be useful, an evaluation must be credible to JTPA decision-makers and others. In large measure, such credibility rests with the independence and neutrality of the evaluation staff. Positioning of the evaluation staff within an organization, and the relationship of that staff to JTPA administrators and policy-makers are important factors influencing the perceived or actual independence of that staff.

6. Develop mechanisms for interim feedback.
The evaluation process is often a lengthy one. Where possible, interim reports, newsletters or presentations help sustain users' interest and commitment to the evaluation. Traditionally, evaluators have avoided such information exchange with users for fear that such feedback might

contaminate data. However, more recently, commentators have suggested that such fears have been overstressed and need to be balanced against the practical advantages such interim feedback offers to practitioners.

7. **Develop a dissemination strategy.**
Traditionally, dissemination is almost an afterthought to an evaluation plan, involving little more than sending copies of the final report to the evaluation funders or perhaps seeking publication of the findings in an academic journal. Expanding the usefulness of an evaluation, however, calls for a broader, more creative approach to dissemination. Such a broader approach might involve:

   - Targeting important users and other interested parties ahead of time and maintaining contact with these groups via newsletter or interim reports.
   - Planning in-person presentations to various users to allow for direct questions and answers about evaluation findings.
   - Where appropriate, identifying other opportunities to present findings to a larger forum of practitioners, as well as researchers, such as a conference or special publication.
   - Discussing ahead of time how users might be involved in dissemination and whether users will be given formal credit or recognition when findings are presented.
   - Considering in what manner public affairs staff might assist in presenting findings.

8. **Produce a clear, well-written report of findings.**
A lengthy, jargon-filled report emphasizing the technical aspects of an evaluation creates what Weiss terms "cognitive obstacles" to its utilization. Utility of an evaluation obviously increases if findings are pitched to a broad audience of interested parties. Ways to increase readability include:

   - Presenting a separate executive summary of findings which highlights the most important conclusions.
   - Placing technical information, where possible, in a separate chapter, appendix or in footnotes.
   - Prominently featuring, through formatting and placement, the main evaluation questions, interpretations, findings and recommendations.
   - Adding a glossary of technical terms, if necessary.
   - Packaging evaluation findings differently for different audiences. For example, pairing technical summaries of findings relating more to research issues or conclusions

with more "user friendly" summaries relating to policy issues of current interest to decision-makers.

9. **Present findings in a timely fashion.**
   Timing is all important in the reporting of evaluation findings. If too much time has elapsed between evaluation planning and reporting, the information presented may no longer be fresh or relevant to users. On the other hand, the user's call for timeliness must be judged against the need to acquire *reliable* and *valid* information through acceptable research procedures, all of which takes time. The point is not to rush through with dubious results, but to agree upon a responsible timeframe initially and then stick to it.

10. **Imbed evaluation in ongoing planning cycles.**
    Ideally, evaluation plays an integral role in an organization's overall planning processes. Evaluation provides feedback at critical junctures in a program cycle, allowing planners and policy-makers to make informed judgments about the future direction of the program. If evaluation is simply tacked on to JTPA programs as an afterthought and is not coordinated with other JTPA planning efforts, then evaluation's utility is likely to be diminished.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is meant to encourage JTPA evaluation planners in the hard exploratory planning work that establishes a solid foundation for later evaluation activities. Scrutinizing a program for evaluability may sound like unnecessarily discouraging or time-consuming work. However, discovering potential program constraints to evaluation early on will give evaluation planners an edge in introducing feasible evaluation activities in a more effective manner.

A related concern is whether the evaluation findings will be sufficiently utilized to justify the evaluation effort. In order to ensure ultimate use, planners need to anticipate potential barriers to utilization and actively build into the evaluation plan strategies for increasing the usefulness and utilization of findings. Since the *organizational context* informs and shapes the evaluation strategy in important ways, the following chapter looks more closely at the relationship between organization and evaluation.

CHAPTER 4
UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

How Will the Organizational Context Impact Evaluation?

Overcoming Organizational Inertia
The Evaluation and the Evaluated
Reducing the Threat of Evaluation

Who Will Participate in and Support Evaluation?

Who Should Do the Evaluation?

CHAPTER 4.

UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation does not occur in a social vacuum. Just as political and organizational factors influence JTPA program design and operation, so will such factors influence the nature and scope of evaluation. The JTPA organizational context is complex, cross-cutting all levels of government and embracing numerous agencies and organizational agendas. Because of this complexity, understanding how organizational factors might intervene to help or hinder evaluation is especially critical to the JTPA evaluation planning process. For example, in such a multi-layered program as JTPA, various organizational tensions and conflicts are bound to occur. The system may not have mechanisms to respond and the conflicts can spill over into the evaluation process.

In addition, the evaluation itself may subtly influence program processes and outcomes. Therefore, not only the context in which evaluation occurs, but also the manner in which evaluation is carried out (in interaction with the context) is also important. For these reasons, preliminary planning for evaluation must include a focus on a third preliminary planning question: How does the organizational context impact evaluation? When ignored during the evaluation planning stage, underlying organizational conflicts can erupt, creating tremendous roadblocks to later implementation and utilization of evaluation. Related questions are: Who will participate in and support evaluation? Who should do the evaluation? The purpose of this chapter is to more fully explore these questions about the organizational context of a JTPA evaluation at the local level.

HOW WILL THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT IMPACT EVALUATION?

For the evaluation planner, the challenge is to identify and knowledgeably work with organizational constraints and supports to evaluation. Since these constraints and supports will vary from program to program, the intention here is to provide a general framework for incorporating organizational issues into the evaluation plan.

Overcoming Organizational Inertia

To accomplish their specified missions, organizations create structures to promote stability and efficiency. Organizations develop structures which establish chains of authority and accountability, standardize operations, and routinize and parcel out work in a specific manner. In creating stable structures, organizations also create vested interests; a major goal of the organization becomes self-preservation. Over time, the very structures developed to enhance the organization's efficient functioning have a tendency to become rigidified and resistant to change. Change means more uncertainty and, as such, constitutes a threat to the organization and its vested interests.

The logic of evaluation, on the other hand, is based on the potential for change. Ideally, evaluation feedback offers a rational mechanism for planned change in the interest of program improvement. Therefore, as a harbinger of such change, the evaluator can expect to encounter some natural organizational resistance to evaluation activities. Sometimes the resistance is not active, but takes the form of passive inability to mobilize for an evaluation effort. Sheer organizational inertia--the urge to follow time-honored structure and patterns which have shaped the organization's identity--inhibits the evaluation undertaking.

Some might suggest that since JTPA is relatively fresh legislation, its programs have not yet had the time to solidify and build up an organizational inertia. However, while JTPA legislation is new, in many cases the local program structures and personnel utilized to implement it are not. Program continuity from CETA days has undoubtedly helped many states and SDAs to mobilize for a JTPA effort more effectively. By the same token, program continuity means that many JTPA organizations are actually long-established with well-defined interests and are likely to resist evaluation geared towards program change. On the other hand, in an age of shrinking public resources, JTPA and other programs are under constant external pressure to improve (i.e., be more productive with fewer resources). Evaluation provides a tool for such change which need not threaten the security and continuity of the organization.

Overcoming organizational inertia or outright resistance to evaluation may present more of a challenge than the actual evaluation itself. JTPA's complex administrative structure may demand that not one, but several separate organizational entities be mobilized to cooperate and participate in evaluation activities, if those activities are to be meaningful.

To accomplish this mobilization, evaluation planners may have to broaden their traditional role to include education, mediation, communication, and public relations activities preparatory to planning the evaluation itself. A common organizational fear is that the evaluation results will only point out program weaknesses and damage program credibility. Program administrators and service providers need to be assured that the evaluation results can enhance program credibility in several ways: The fact that a program embraces evaluation as a tool for innovation and improvement itself sends a positive message to program sponsors. Moreover, a balanced program evaluation will help identify program strengths, as well as weaknesses, uncovering program accomplishments which compliance measures do not take into account. And finally, evaluation may produce information that compensates for or explains lower compliance with performance standards.

The Evaluator and the Evaluated

Even if only temporarily, the evaluator also becomes a part of the organizational landscape in which he or she is operating. How those being evaluated perceive the evaluator and how the evaluator, in turn, interacts with those he or she observes, must inescapably influence the evaluation process. For these reasons, the evaluator must be sensitive to his or her role as an innovator within the organization and anticipate potential difficulties arising from that role. The first big challenge for the evaluator is to reduce the threatening aspects of this role.

Regardless of the specific purpose behind an evaluation, the evaluator wishes to be regarded as a facilitator of positive change within the system being evaluated. However, it is difficult for those being evaluated to embrace the evaluator's most positive point of view: their natural prejudice is that the evaluator has come to point a disapproving finger at what they are doing wrong. If nothing is done to soften this negative predisposition to the evaluator, if no assurances and protection are given to the evaluated, then an evaluator's presence is likely to induce a defensive posture that is not conducive to the ultimate goals of the evaluation.

If program staff feel unsure of the purposes behind the evaluation, their defensive actions can seriously undermine the evaluation process. For example, in one case, JTPA evaluators were investigating the impacts of a special JTPA program through use of a comparison group of non-participants. When the evaluation was in progress, the evaluators discovered that program staff, in their eagerness to prove the program's worth, became unofficial program gatekeepers--assigning for JTPA services only the most obviously job-ready. As a result, it became difficult to assess whether positive outcomes were due to the program services or to the select nature of clients receiving those services.

The evaluator unavoidably has an affect not only on the social climate of a program (an intruder on sacred soil) but also on the working conditions within the program. In requiring interviews and planning meetings, the evaluator distracts staff and administrators from their regular work load. Whether staff perceive evaluation duties as a burden or an intrusion depends, in part, on the sensitivity of the evaluator and how well staff are briefed as to the nature of the evaluation and the importance of their role in the evaluation process.

In a positive context, evaluation interviews and planning meetings can offer SDA and service provider staff a chance to be heard and make a meaningful contribution. In addition, an evaluation project generates its own phoning, typing and other office requirements, which may place extra burdens on an already overloaded support staff. Resentments over this new work can build if expectations for program staff participation are not initially clarified with the evaluation staff.

The evaluator's (or evaluation staff's) perceived status may also be significant to the success of the evaluation. If, for example, the evaluator is perceived to be too closely aligned with the administrative power structure, this perception may impair the credibility of the evaluator and his or her ability to carry out evaluation functions. On the other hand, if the evaluator is perceived as lacking sufficient administrative support, he or she may be seen as "marginal" in relation to ongoing program operations. The message is that evaluation is not really valued and participant cooperation in the effort may be undermined.

Finally, the evaluator must confront the possibility that his or her presence constitutes an additional intervention, or independent influence which may affect the program in an unknown fashion. If, for example, the evaluator is seen as a threatening presence, staff morale and program effectiveness may decline. Alternatively, staff may take extraordinary measures which artificially and temporarily boost program performance. Even if the evaluator is viewed in a strictly neutral light, the subjects of the evaluation (who may range from JTPA clients to PIC members) may simply react to the process of being studied (the well-known Hawthorne effect).

While such influences cannot be totally eliminated, evaluators, in being sensitive to their role within the organizational setting, can seek to minimize their impact on the research process. The sample checklist which follows on the next page summarizes how the evaluator's role can be clarified, not only to help the evaluator but also the program staff, administrators and evaluation sponsors who must interact with the evaluator.

CLARIFYING THE EVALUATOR'S ROLE:

YES	NO	
☐	☐	1. Evaluator-Administrator Authority Is there written agreement about the evaluation decisions and who will be involved in making those decisions?
☐	☐	2. Evaluator-Administrator Responsibilities Have responsibilities for both administrators and evaluators been clearly defined in writing?
☐	☐	3. Evaluator-Staff Responsibilities Has the degree of program staff participation and work responsibilities been defined and put in writing?
☐	☐	4. Communications Have formal channels of communication among the various evaluation participants been established?
☐	☐	5. Resources Utilization Are there written agreements about the use of in-house resources (e.g., phones, copying equipment, office space, etc.) by the evaluation staff?
☐	☐	6. Disagreements Are there written procedures for resolving disagreements between program and evaluation staff when they arise?
☐	☐	7. Briefing Staff Have program staff been briefed on the above relevant agreements?
☐	☐	8. Involving Staff Are opportunities for interaction and exchange of information with program staff scheduled into the evaluation process?
☐	☐	9. Introducing the Evaluators and the Evaluation Has initial time been set aside for introducing the evaluator and evaluation plans to the staff and allowing for staff questions.
☐	☐	10. Evaluator Influence on the Program Have the evaluator's planned activities been assessed for possible influence on program operations and outcomes?

Adapted from: Kay Adams and Jerry Walker, Improving the Accountability of Career Education Programs: Evaluation Outlines and Checklists, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Columbus, OH, 1979

Reducing the Threat of Evaluation

The evaluator is not automatically doomed to alien status within a hostile and mistrustful program environment. Although some organizational factors may be beyond the evaluator's control, the evaluation plan can include several strategies to demystify evaluation and reduce a program staff's initial fears about the evaluator and the evaluation process:

- Involve not only program administration, but program staff, as well, in the initial and subsequent evaluation planning activities in order to enhance user understanding and commitment to the evaluation.
- Make clear to program personnel the purposes and anticipated consequences of the evaluation. Ideally, consequences center around constructive program change so that the program can be allowed room to fail, but then move on. Remove the threat of sanctions being attached to the evaluation to the degree possible.
- Emphasize the evaluation of programs, not personnel. The more emphasis placed on evaluating the program attributes, as opposed to staff attributes, the less threatening the evaluation process. If staff inadequacies are a central concern, then other vehicles besides program evaluation should be considered to address this concern.
- Establish clear lines of authority separating evaluation staff from program administration staff.
- Introduce an initial evaluation effort into the least threatening program situation. For example, focus initial inquiry on overall program structures, processes or outcomes, rather than on individual service providers
- Assure confidentiality to clients, staff and all other participants in evaluation.
- Select evaluators whose organizational status is perceived as most neutral and non-threatening.

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN AND SUPPORT EVALUATION EFFORTS?

Numerous distinct state and local level organizations are involved in the administration, planning and implementation of JTPA activities. At the local level, PIC members, SDA officials and staff, city planners and policy-makers, and service providers are all participating to varying degrees in JTPA. In addition, city council members, business groups, local welfare and Employment Service offices and the local economic development agency may play an active or influential role. All these organizational actors have developed a stake within the JTPA system and therefore have a legitimate interest in evaluation design, implementation and outcomes which affect them.

Before launching into a full-blown evaluation effort, one should consider the roles these various organizational actors play within JTPA and how supportive of evaluation they are likely to be. How active or central a role does each organization play? How receptive to or constrained by evaluation are key actors? What explicit or implicit agency agendas might affect the evaluation effort? Ignoring the interests of a particular JTPA stake-holder in the planning phase may impede the evaluation in later implementation and utilization phases.

Interorganizational Relations: Conflict or Cooperation?

It is not sufficient to know who the organizational actors are and what their stakes in JTPA entail; one also needs to know how these various groups interact with one another. Existing organizational patterns of interaction are often best understood in a historical context. Some organizational elements of JTPA (like many of the reconstituted PICs) are totally new, while others have an important history predating JTPA and influencing current patterns of interagency cooperation, communication and conflict.

Do the PIC, local program staff, local officials and involved agencies regularly communicate with each other? Are there unresolved turf battles over JTPA or other program areas? Have personality conflicts marred interagency cooperation in the past? These are the kinds of questions an evaluation planning group will have to pose and answer in order to lay the organizational groundwork to support an evaluation effort.

Conflicting Interests

Sometimes organizational interests are pitted against each other in ways that make coordinated evaluation very difficult. Conflicting interests are most likely to arise where two agencies share the same client base, as is the case with many JTPA and welfare programs.

Competition between these two programs can be particularly intense when the fuller funding of JTPA has translated into less funding for welfare recipients enrolled in JTPA, and it is no longer in the interest of welfare agencies to refer clients to JTPA. Nor, for that matter, is it in their interest to participate in an evaluation which might validate JTPA at welfare's expense.

If agencies have a history of poor communication or turf battles over who should administer what programs or who should set policy, this history can spill over into and stymie evaluation efforts in important ways:

- Access to necessary data, program documents or clients may be delayed or made more difficult.
- Otherwise useful in-house resources may not be discovered and shared.
- The organizational input necessary for formulating useful evaluation questions may not occur.
- The general utility of evaluation findings may not be recognized by important decision-makers.

These kinds of potential obstacles are especially worth considering if a process evaluation is contemplated. Access to various agencies and rapport with agency staff will be important to the evaluator hoping to get at key processes and interactions relevant to the JTPA system.

Conversely, identifying potentially positive interagency connections provides a base on which an evaluation effort can be built. Evaluation activities that cross agency or divisional boundaries, while providing extra challenges to planning and coordination may also provide unique opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas within the overall JTPA organization. Since evaluation often requires special coordination among different units, the evaluation process can create a supportive context for interaction across territorial lines. Such interaction can itself be valuable in informing people about decision-making and work agendas in different agencies, reducing organizational isolation and improving coordination of resources. Whatever the organizational configuration, the planning role cannot remain purely technical. The evaluation planner may need to play information broker and mediator, acting as a conduit to open up or enlarge channels of communication and cooperation.

Cooperative Evaluation Planning

If JTPA evaluation is not to be lost in a thicket of organizational agendas, it is important that central actors are able to jointly participate in planning efforts and arrive at some common understanding as to how evaluation is to benefit JTPA as a whole. Building up such multi-faceted participation is a challenging task because JTPA concerns multiple actors with multiple interests, needs, and fears, who are often not used to working across divisional boundaries.

As stake-holders in the JTPA system, agencies/actors need to feel that they are each getting something out of participating in the evaluation effort. A crucial task becomes eliciting from primary actors what it is they are willing to give and get in return as participants in the evaluation process. Also the task is to help sensitize actors to each other's concerns, bringing covert issues into the bargaining arena (e.g., the perennial problem of data acquisition across agencies) so that necessary agreements can be negotiated upfront before evaluation commences.

WHO SHOULD DO THE EVALUATION?

The organizational context should also influence who plans, implements and administers a JTPA evaluation. Should the employment and training staff have primary responsibility for evaluation or should a policy-making body like the PIC? Or should an organization more removed from the JTPA system have primary evaluation responsibilities? Should evaluation responsibilities be divided? Clearly, given enormous organizational variation across SDAs, no one organization is the "right" place to house an evaluation effort. What works well in one local setting may not be transferable to another. Below are some factors in choosing and locating an evaluation staff.

Authority Structure: The position of an evaluation staff within an organizational hierarchy is important. Ideally, evaluation staff will be sufficiently detached from the existing hierarchy so that they are not perceived to hold any direct power over those being evaluated or, conversely, those in a program being evaluated do not have direct authority or influence over the evaluators. Such detachment is often sought by contracting out to a private consultant or by establishing an independent evaluation unit.

When the head of an evaluation unit reports directly to chief decision-makers in an organization, evaluation activities are more likely to be better supported (fiscally and politically) and evaluation information better utilized by managers and policy-makers. Such a direct link to power holders, however, may need to be offset with extra efforts to bring a range of appropriate division administrators and relevant staff into the planning process. Otherwise, there is the danger that those lower down will feel compromised by or excluded from important decision-making and become less supportive of the evaluation effort.

When an employment and training agency is attempting its own in-house evaluation, sufficient detachment of evaluation staff may be more difficult to achieve. This is not to argue that self-evaluation should be abandoned. Rather, the financial and other practical merits of this approach need to be weighed against the potential structural drawbacks of having a less organizationally autonomous evaluation staff.

If an in-house evaluation unit is used, a key issue is placement of that unit. When the unit is not completely separate from other operations, its members may be in the uncomfortable position of evaluating JTPA operations managed by people above them in the organizational hierarchy.

Compliance vs. Evaluation: The JTPA authority structure at the local level is partially defined by who conducts compliance-related activities. Many SDAs have developed special monitoring and compliance units which routinely collect and analyze JTPA program data and audit certain aspects of JTPA program operations. Since these units are already collecting some information about JTPA and since evaluation is often viewed as an elegant offshoot of monitoring, the temptation is to lump evaluation activities in with ongoing monitoring and compliance operations. (This tendency is probably also reinforced by the CETA legacy of mingling compliance and technical functions under one roof.)

From a purely technical standpoint, piggybacking evaluation onto ongoing monitoring operations may make sense: staff are familiar with the data and with program operations and personnel. However, from an organizational standpoint, such an arrangement may be quite problematic. As mentioned earlier, downplaying the threatening aspects of evaluation and enlisting the cooperation of those being evaluated is an important ingredient to planning a successful evaluation. The neutral, non-threatening posture an evaluation staff seeks is readily compromised in the eyes of those being evaluated if that same staff is also connected with compliance activities. The inherently threatening aspects of evaluation are heightened by the fact that the office which evaluates is also the office which critiques and sanctions. A compromise approach might be to involve monitoring and compliance staff as special evaluation consultants who can provide unique information and insights into JTPA program operations, allowing others to actually implement the evaluation.

Independence and Neutrality: An evaluation staff's perceived neutrality is closely connected to its position in the organizational hierarchy. If the objectivity of evaluators is questioned either by decision-makers or those being evaluated, the whole purpose of the evaluation effort may be called into question and the potential utility of that effort lost.

The quest for neutrality does not inevitably lead to expensive outside consultants. First, hiring outside consultants does not automatically remove the suspicion of bias--outside evaluators may merely be viewed as an extension of those who hire them. Second, there are alternative approaches to JTPA evaluation that sufficiently meet the requirements of independence and neutrality. For example, evaluation can be accomplished through an independent research unit under the PIC, the SDA administrative entity or under local government (For a further comparison of different evaluation staffing strategies, see Chapter 10.)

Trust: Trust is another important consideration in deciding who is best able to carry out an evaluation effort. Trust enhances the ability of the evaluator to gain entry to a program and elicit information and assistance from program administration and staff. Where the relationship between the PIC and SDA staff, for example, is characterized by a certain amount of tension or mistrust, a distancing of evaluation staff from both organizations may be important.

An evaluator's neutrality does not necessarily guarantee trust or vice-versa. In fact, trust may be based on the evaluator's perceived positive bias towards a program. In choosing the evaluation staff, trade-offs may have to be made between who has greatest rapport and access to program information and who has greatest neutrality and independence.

Competency: Technical competency of an evaluation staff is a primary consideration to factor into a decision about how to build an evaluation capability. Without proper technical expertise, an evaluation is more likely to waste resources and produce results of questionable validity and usefulness. Technical competency and efficiency, while of primary importance, should not be the sole criteria for location of an evaluation effort. In addition to traditional notions of competency and expertise, familiarity with JTPA programs and the ability to maneuver within the system and get things done are also important attributes for an evaluation staff.

Coordination Capabilities: The more comprehensive the evaluation effort, the greater the need to involve and coordinate. Who is best able to perform vital coordination efforts--to bring interested parties together in critical planning stages, to establish interagency agreements about data and resource sharing, to bridge communication gaps when necessary? Here again, some argue that these critical non-technical competencies must be obtained by hiring an outside consultant whose vision can transcend the narrower perspectives of individual JTPA personnel. On the other hand, in-house staff, by virtue of their superior knowledge of interagency history and personnel, may also be in a good position to perform such coordination functions.

CONCLUSION: DEVELOPING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE TO SUPPORT EVALUATION

This chapter has examined some of the major organizational issues confronting a JTPA evaluation planning effort. In every stage of the evaluation process, organizational factors can exert profound influences on that process. If organizational support is lacking, the evaluation effort may flounder and ultimately fail. Traditional evaluation planning begins with the assumption that the organizational context is set. In contrast, the assumption presented here is that JTPA evaluation planning must actively consider the organizational environment in which that planning takes place. Planning expands to include not only a preliminary organizational assessment of those factors likely to influence evaluation, but also preliminary strategies for building better organizational support for evaluation. Some suggested strategies, implicit in much of the preceding discussion are encapsulated as follows.

- Develop leadership support: The interest and cooperation of relevant program heads and other key administrators is important to obtain before planning reaches too advanced a stage.

- Educate key decision-makers and their staffs: Decision-makers are often unaware of the benefits of evaluation and need first to be educated before they will support evaluation. Educational efforts might include circulating policy papers, promoting conference attendance, or sharing the results of evaluation activities in other states. Essentially, leadership needs to be convinced that supporting evaluation, even though results might be less than positive, is a politically responsible position to take.

- Involve key actors: Preliminary meetings with key actors in the evaluation process will help shape an evaluation approach that accommodates a variety of concerns and does not exacerbate inter- or intra-agency conflict. Staff as well as administrators need to be included in early planning and/or briefing meetings.

- Identify side-benefits of evaluation for different participants: In addition to the desired information evaluation is expected to provide, users will want to know about particular (often unanticipated) side-benefits evaluation might yield. Often these side-benefits are intangible such as improved agency coordination or more positive interagency relations. (For more on this theme refer back to Chapter 1 and to the discussion on measuring evaluation benefits in Chapter 7.)

- Develop advisory groups: To ensure greater understanding of and commitment to evaluation, some training programs sponsor evaluation advisory groups. Group members not only may include agency representatives, but outside professionals or other citizens to lend additional support and credibility to the endeavor.

- Develop innovative funding and staffing alternatives: Sources of support for evaluation exist beyond the usual organizational channels. Moving outside an agency for evaluation resources can extend the base of interest and support for such activity. (More on this point in Chapters 9 and 10.)

- Put interagency agreements and assurances in writing: Successful evaluation often depends upon interagency cooperation and sharing of resources. Since control of resources is always a sensitive organizational issue, negotiated agreements about access to data, clients, staff and other resources need to be in writing to avoid future misunderstanding.

- Use a team planning approach: A team approach to planning makes sense where a lot of inter- or intra-agency coordination and communication is necessary for accomplishing evaluation tasks. Even if an outside evaluator is brought in to do the work, a team might also play a useful advisory role, providing a mechanism for more direct organizational involvement and commitment to the evaluation.

SECTION 3
TOWARDS A JTPA EVALUATION PLAN

These next chapters continue with an exploration of the evaluation planning process. As in the previous chapters, this process is approached through a series of key questions confronting the JTPA evaluation planner. In the course of answering these questions, the planner follows a roughly sequential set of steps culminating in a practical, comprehensive plan for carrying out a JTPA evaluation effort.

CHAPTER 5

FORMULATING EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND A RESEARCH DESIGN

What Are the Important Questions to Be Answered by Evaluation?

What Evaluation Approach Makes Sense?

What Data, Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods Will Be Required?

CHAPTER 5.

FORMULATING EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND A RESEARCH DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

We began the previous chapter with a set of key planning questions about program evaluability, utilization of evaluation, and the organizational context in which evaluation occurs. We now turn to an additional set of planning questions which help to define the nature and scope of particular JTPA evaluation activities. These questions suggest a general planning sequence culminating in a specific evaluation research design. This sequence is built around the following explorations:

- **What are the important questions to be answered by evaluation?**
- **What evaluation approach makes sense?**
- **What data, data collection and data analysis methods will be required?**

This chapter is devoted to examining each of these planning questions in turn.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED BY EVALUATION?

As has been stressed in the previous section, an evaluation's usefulness hinges in large measure on its providing information that users need in order to make more informed decisions about JTPA programs. The actual design of an evaluation, therefore, develops around a key set of research questions about JTPA's effectiveness, efficiency, or program costs. These key questions will, of course, vary at different points in time across different state and local program settings, but in general, evaluation will concern one or more of the following generic questions:

TYPICAL PROGRAM EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Did the program achieve its stated goals?
- Did the program have unintended results (good or bad)?
- Was the program implemented as planned?
- How might implementation be improved?
- Who benefited most or least from the program?
- Did program participants as a whole benefit significantly?
- What did the program cost?
- Which program activities were most/least cost effective?

Defining what are the most significant questions to be answered about JTPA will help set the parameters of an evaluation effort early on in the planning process.

Developing Evaluation Questions

Ideally, evaluation questions are generated by the potential users of the evaluation (also referred to as "stake-holders"). Users are most often program administrators, policy-makers or special funders of a program; users can also more broadly include other stake-holders such as staff and the interested public. As mentioned previously, user participation can be crucial in evaluation planning: user input not only increases the user's commitment to the evaluation effort, but also focuses that effort on relevant issues.

During the question formulation stage, however, evaluation staff do not have to abdicate to users entirely. Sometimes uncovering specific questions is a difficult process; users may have problems developing researchable inquiries about the program. Because JTPA is so tremendously "performance driven", users may have difficulty moving from a compliance and monitoring mode to broader inquiries. In such cases, the evaluation staff can play an important educative role in eliciting or reformulating questions from various users. Ultimately, however, user interests have to be central to the evaluation if the findings and recommendations are to have an appreciative audience.

Different Users, Different Questions

Bringing different users into the question formulation stage can create additional challenges for the evaluator because different users may be interested in entirely different questions. Conflicts may surface between different decision-making levels or branches of a JTPA program as to what is truly important to know about JTPA. For example, at the service delivery level, program staff may be more interested in the impacts JTPA interventions are having on clients. (Are clients being placed effectively?) While PIC members may be more concerned with the business community's perceptions and involvement, administrative users may be more intrigued with studying the cost-effectiveness of JTPA; political leaders may be more concerned with justifying public expenditures or meeting constituents' perceived needs.

When state and SDA users are jointly involved in evaluation, there are potentially thornier issues to resolve as to the focus of the evaluation. Since the state can ultimately sanction a poorly performing SDA, that SDA must be more directly and unyieldingly concerned with performance issues. State JTPA policy-makers, on the other hand, may feel less compelled to examine immediate performance outcomes and focus instead on more long-term effectiveness measures of the program. The question formulation stage ideally can provide an additional opportunity for information exchange and accommodation between these two groups.

Narrowing the Focus of the Evaluation

Once users and evaluation staff have generated sufficient evaluation questions, these questions need to be prioritized and the scope of the evaluation determined, according to the time and resources allotted. Even though they seem important, some questions may need to be eliminated because discovering their answers will prove too time consuming or costly.

Attempting to answer too many questions in one evaluation effort is a common pitfall. When the scope of evaluation work is too grandiose, staff and other resources may be stretched too thin to produce a quality product. An overly ambitious scope of work not only increases the complexity of coordination of staff activity, but also increases the likelihood of missed time deadlines and budget overruns. For all these reasons, defining priority questions as early as possible creates an important foundation for later evaluation activity. [NOTE: If users formulated questions some time previous to the current evaluation effort, evaluators need to check them for continued relevance.]

Rating Evaluation Questions

A JTPA evaluation might address any number of potential questions about client outcomes, employer participation, and JTPA program implementation. Out of all the possible questions, the evaluation users must pare down their list to those questions which seem most essential and most feasible to answer. To prioritize questions, users may need to apply a rating system, as the following sample shows.

EVALUATION QUESTION RATING SYSTEM

Importance		Feasibility
	What are participant wage levels, employment levels and welfare status 6 months after termination from JTPA?	
	How do employers benefit from participation in JTPA?	
	How are service delivery arrangements supporting or inhibiting the achievement of JTPA program goals?	

Instructions: Rate the importance and feasibility of answering the above questions, using a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 = high importance or feasibility, and 1 = low importance or feasibility. Those questions which are rated high in importance (4 to 5) and are considered at least moderately feasible (3 or higher) should be considered for evaluation.

Adapted from: Kay Adams and Jerry Walker, Improving the Accountability of Career Education Programs: Evaluation Guidelines and Checklists, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Columbus, OH, 1979, p. 38

Narrowing the evaluation focus to a specific set of questions to be answered can be one of the more frustrating and time-consuming steps in planning a JTPA program evaluation. The process may call for a generous dose of mediation and negotiation among different users. It may require the preliminary sketching out of various contingencies concerning funding, staffing and data collection and the revising of questions to meet these contingencies. This planning time is well spent if it yields a manageable set of evaluation questions which reflect what users most want to know about JTPA. This set of questions forms the heart of the evaluation, informing and directing the research efforts that follow.

WHAT EVALUATION APPROACH MAKES SENSE?

Once key evaluation questions have been selected, the task is to choose a research strategy for answering those questions. The issue at this stage of planning is what strategy is most appropriate, given the nature of the evaluation questions and given numerous resource constraints, such as time, staff expertise, and data accessibility.

Evaluation Approaches

There are several basic evaluation research approaches and numerous variations on these approaches. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses and is appropriate to answering particular kinds of questions. This entire series on JTPA evaluation focuses on three main types of evaluation: net impact, gross impact and process evaluations. For an overview of the important characteristics of and differences between these evaluation types, refer to Chapter 2 of this volume and the introductory chapters of Volumes III, IV and V. As a quick review, these three evaluation approaches are summarized on the following page in terms of the sorts of evaluation questions to which each approach best responds.

EVALUATION APPROACH: NET IMPACT

General Questions Asked:	JTPA-Specific Questions:
What outcomes can be attributed to the program, rather than to other influences?	Do JTPA clients in general do significantly better in the labor market than non-participants with similar profiles?
What service strategies are most effective for which groups of clients?	What kinds of treatments have a greater impact on client earnings?
	Are multi-strategy program approaches more likely to have a greater impact than single strategy programs?
	Do some client groups benefit more from JTPA (in terms of increased earnings) than other client groups?

EVALUATION APPROACH: GROSS IMPACT EVALUATION

General Questions Asked:	JTPA-Specific Questions:
What are the post program outcomes for program participants?	What is the overall picture of participant employment, wages and welfare status at three months, six months or nine months after termination?
	How does this picture change over time?
How are employers affected by the program?	To what degree does JTPA participation raise or lower the turnover rate for an employer? affect training time? affect supervision or hiring?
How do treatment results compare to one another?	Which treatment strategies (e.g., long-term vs. short-term, OJT vs. Classroom training) have more positive outcomes relative to other treatment strategies?
How may placements for clients be characterized?	Do post-program jobs for JTPA clients resemble primary or secondary market positions? Are positions training-related?

EVALUATION APPROACH: PROCESS EVALUATION

General Questions Asked:	JTPA-Specific Questions:
How is the program being implemented?	How are SDA policies being formulated and carried out?
Is program implementation affecting program outcomes?	How are SDA policies and procedures affecting JTPA service delivery?
	Are certain service delivery arrangements supporting or inhibiting achievement of JTPA goals?
	What are the characteristics of clients served?

If the set of key questions selected straddles more than one evaluation approach, but comprehensive evaluation is not feasible, something must give. An obvious option is to pursue only those questions clustering around a single evaluation approach. However, this approach has its drawbacks: eliminating all process-related questions in favor of impact related ones, for example, may ultimately narrow the utility of the impact findings; the richness and explanatory capabilities of process findings are sacrificed.

Alternatively, evaluation planners might contemplate multiple, but scaled down evaluation approaches to accommodate the various questions that are of greatest interest. Both the gross impact and the process evaluation designs lend themselves to this kind of flexible application.

Obviously, a number of factors in the real world will influence the kind of evaluation approach selected: evaluation costs, timeframe for accomplishing the evaluation, data requirements, staff and other resource capabilities, and organizational demands. But regardless of these various considerations, the approach should be driven by questions of central importance to users and funders if the evaluation findings are to benefit and be of use.

WHAT DATA, DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS METHODS WILL BE REQUIRED?

Settling upon a basic evaluation approach is only the first step in a series of research planning decisions about how the evaluation is actually to be carried out--the specific JTPA variables to be studied, the kinds of data to be collected, and the manner in which the data are to be collected and analyzed. The end result of these decisions is a feasible research design for answering the questions initially posed about the efficiency or effectiveness of JTPA.

Here again, real world considerations impinge upon the choices evaluation planners would ideally like to make. The full range of data desired may be too costly or time-consuming to collect in its entirety. Some information may be difficult to retrieve or inaccessible. Staff may lack expertise in specific kinds of statistical analysis required by a research approach. In recognition of these kinds of issues, the specific analysis guides (Volumes III, IV, and V) for process, gross impact and net impact evaluations attempt to balance the need for practical, flexible assessment tools with requirements for scientific soundness in the research methods used. Specific questions about the kinds of data to be collected and analyzed are addressed in each of these analysis guides.

Some general data collection and MIS-related issues cross-cut the various evaluation approaches. Is the requisite data available through the current information system? Is the data comparable across SDAs? What kind of data sharing agreements across agencies will be necessary? These sorts of issues will be covered in more detail in Chapter 8. They are only mentioned in passing here to emphasize that planning for data collection and analysis may involve some special challenges to be discovered and met well in advance of evaluation implementation.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation design process begins with a set of well-defined questions reflecting what administrators, funders or other users most want to know about JTPA programs. These questions, in turn, largely determine what the overall evaluation approaches will be. The task of the evaluation planner at this stage is to translate the general framework of evaluation questions into a specific research design for accomplishing the evaluation. This task is the central focus of the net impact, gross impact, and process evaluation guides in this series.

The following chapters assume that planners have already considered the important research design issues and are now able to move on to more specific resource and implementation planning.

CHAPTER 6
DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN

What Does a Good Evaluation Plan Entail?

What Resources Will Evaluation Require?

What Time Schedule Will Evaluation Activities Depend Upon?

How Will Evaluation Activities Be Monitored?

CHAPTER 6.

DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Once the major evaluation research questions outlined in the previous chapter have been resolved (a research approach and design selected, data collection and analysis issues resolved), evaluation planners can think more specifically about how the evaluation will be implemented and can chart a course for the evaluation activities to follow. This course of planning is highlighted by the following questions:

- **What does a good evaluation plan entail?**
- **What resources will the evaluation require?**
- **What time schedule will evaluation activities depend upon?**
- **How will evaluation activities be monitored?**
- **What will the evaluation cost, and will potential benefits outweigh the cost?**

This chapter will tackle the first four questions. The issue of evaluation costs and benefits will be reserved for the following and final chapter of this section.

WHAT DOES A GOOD EVALUATION PLAN ENTAIL?

A written evaluation plan is an invaluable tool for both conceptualizing and carrying out well-coordinated, timely, and useful evaluation activities. Ideally, an evaluation plan comprehensively documents all the various planning and management decisions which must precede and direct the actual carrying out of the evaluation.

Committing this plan to writing is helpful in several ways. First, a written plan creates a conceptual record which can continually be referred to for clarification and direction. As a written record, the plan is more subject to outside review, critique and revision than is a set of plans carried around in someone's head. A written record also allows for a more broadly shared understanding of the evaluation process and how the conceptual work of planners will shape that process. For the evaluation team, of course, such an understanding is crucial to the efficient coordination of evaluation tasks. Evaluation users may also appreciate knowing more about the planning considerations influencing the evaluation, as documented in a good evaluation plan.

The Plan as a Blueprint for Action

Rather than a single document, the comprehensive evaluation plan can consist of a number of interrelated statements, descriptions, charts and checklists. Informal notes, memos and interviews can be supporting or supplemental documents to the main plan.

Whatever written format is used, the core of the plan should provide a detailed blueprint of the sequential activities occurring in each phase of the evaluation. The evaluation process usually encompasses three major phases:

- a planning phase;
- an implementation phase; and,
- a reporting and dissemination phase.

Since the activities each phase includes will vary from one evaluation setting to another, no set checklist of activities can apply to all situations. The evaluation activities listed on the following page are meant to illustrate the generic categories of activities a plan might cover.

A SAMPLE LIST OF EVALUATION ACTIVITIES COVERED IN AN EVALUATION PLAN

PHASE I: PLANNING

(1) Collecting background information on JTPA programs, including:

- Reading and analyzing relevant program related documents, past reports
- Preliminary meetings with sponsors and other users of evaluation
- Preliminary introduction/briefing with program staff
- Site visit(s)
- Selecting advisory committee

(2) Assessing evaluability

- Interviewing key staff regarding technical, organizational, and political factors affecting evaluability
- Brief outline of findings and recommendations for proceeding
- Meeting with and feedback from program administrators

(3) Formulating questions

- Review by users and advisory committee
- Question and answer session with users (feasibility issues)
- Final selection of questions

(4) Developing an evaluation research design

- Review data to be collected (availability, validity, reliability)
- Data collection procedures (sampling strategy and interview procedures)
- Data analysis procedures

(5) Assigning and briefing staff and developing an overall resource plan

(6) Developing dissemination strategies

(7) Reviewing by advisory committee

PHASE II: IMPLEMENTATION

(1) Briefing all concerned staff

(2) Field testing interview instruments

(3) Data collection

- MIS data
- Interview data

(4) Data cleaning procedures and other preparation for analysis

(5) Analyzing data

(6) Interpreting the results

PHASE III: DISSEMINATION

(1) Preparing interim reports

(2) Reviewing by users and advisory committee/questions and feedback

(3) Preparing final report and recommendations

(4) Reviewing (formal)

(5) Preparing article-length summary of evaluation report

(6) Scheduling question and answer meeting(s) and final in-person presentation

---

In serving as the evaluation's blueprint, the core of the evaluation plan covers not only activities, but also the costs, timing, resources and management which these activities entail. The part of the blueprint which focuses on resource utilization and costs is sometimes called a resource plan, which is the focus of the next section. (A specific example of a resource plan is presented in the next section.)

Statement of Purpose

In addition to a blueprint for action, the overall plan should contain a statement of the evaluation's purposes and goals and the questions the evaluation intends to address. Such a statement acts as a conceptual reference point for the rest of the evaluation plan. At the end of the evaluation, the statement of purpose also offers a yardstick for measuring the evaluation's accomplishments. Did the evaluation effort stick to the original goals? Did it serve the purposes it was supposed to serve? Did it answer the questions that were posed?

Summary

There is no simple recipe for creating a good evaluation plan. From the preceding discussion, several guidelines may be distilled:

- The plan should be in writing.
- The plan should be comprehensive.
- The plan should include a blueprint for carrying out all phases of the evaluation.
- The plan should cover all evaluation activities, costs, timing, resources and management.
- The plan should contain a statement of purpose and goals.

A specific checklist for elements in the evaluation plan is included at the end of this chapter. First, we look more specifically at some resource management aspects of the overall plan.

WHAT RESOURCES WILL THE EVALUATION REQUIRE?

Since evaluation needs, interests and capabilities will vary across local settings, so will resources required. A resource plan, a written strategy for accomplishing the evaluation, is an essential tool for effectively planning and managing the evaluation effort. The plan may begin as a tentative document subject to all kinds of attacks and revisions in the initial stages of evaluation planning. Before the actual evaluation focus (which questions are to be answered) and approach (what evaluation design is appropriate) are delineated, the plan must be sketchy. But as certain early decision points are reached, the plan takes on greater detail and form.

Elements of a Resource Plan

A resource plan can be devised according to a number of formats. Whatever format is chosen, the basic elements of the plan include:

- A sequential listing of evaluation tasks to be performed and products to be produced
- A time allotment for each task
- The staff and other resources needed for each task
- An estimate of the quantity or amount of resources required (number of staff hours, computation or word processing time, etc.)

All of the above elements need to be identified in writing and combined in some easily readable form. A simplified example of an evaluation resource plan follows. As this example illustrates, many JTPA evaluators will require some special staff or consultant input at key junctures. For a look at the special staff skills JTPA evaluation may call for and other staffing issues, see Chapter 10.

SAMPLE RESOURCE PLAN FOR EVALUATION

Activities	Staff Assignments	Staff Time (days)	Total Time Stf/Other	Other Special Staff and Resources
PHASE I: Planning				
(1) Collecting background information	Sanchez Johnson Heller	2 10 5	17/3	consultant (3 days)
(2) Assessing evaluability	Johnson	2	2/2	consultant (2 days)
(3) Formulating questions	Johnson Heller	5 2	7/ .5	consultant review (.5 day)
(4) Developing a design	Johnson Chang Miller	2 7 7	16/3	borrow statistician from agency X for review (1 day); consult with programmar (2 days)
(5) Assigning and briefing staff/ developing resource plan	Sanchez Johnson	2 2	4/0	
(6) Developing dissemination strategies	Sanchez	1	1/0	
(7) Reviewing and feedback by Advisory Committee; making revisions	Sanchez Johnson	2 4	6/1	advisory committee*; consultant review of plan (1 day)
PHASE II: Implementation				
(1) Briefing affected program staff	Heller Johnson	2 2	4/0	
(2) Conducting field test of interview instrument	Miller	3	3/4	field test interviewers (2 days)
(3) Data collection	Chang Miller	10 6	16/14	interviewers (10 days); computer time and operators (4 days)

* Advisory committee time is not calculated here because it is an external resource which is free to the evaluating agency.

(SAMPLE PLAN, continued)

(4)	Reviewing data cleaning procedures/ preparing for analysis	Chang	4	4/1	consult with programmar (1 day)
(5)	Analyzing data	Chang	5	15/2	computer time (2 days; borrow statistician for review (2 days)
		Miller	5		
		Johnson	5		
(6)	Interpreting results	Chang	2	6/1	consultant review
		Miller	2		
		Johnson	2		

PHASE III: Dissemination

(1)	Preparing interim reports	Chang	3	5/2.5	word processing time (2.5 days)
		Johnson	2		
(2)	Reviewing by users/ committee	Johnson	1	1/0	advisory committee (1 day)
(3)	Preparing final report	Chang	4	8/5	Word processing (3 days) and public affairs (2 days)
		Johnson	4		
(4)	Reviewing	Johnson	1	1/0	advisory committee
(5)	Preparing special summary	Johnson	2	2/0	
(6)	Presenting in person	Chang	1	1/0	

Adapted from: Arlene Fink and Jaqueline Kosecoff, Evaluation Basics; A Practitioner's Manual, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982, p. 35.

The Utility of a Resource Plan

The resource plan is important and useful to the evaluation effort for a number of reasons:

- A thorough resource plan anticipates all activities and tasks comprising the evaluation and the kinds of resources necessary for the completion of those tasks.
- In apportioning out the work to be done, a resource plan can suggest a realistic timeframe for accomplishing the evaluation.
- The plan may encourage comparison of alternative allocations of resources.
- The plan identifies resource gaps which may need to be filled by outside consultants or others.
- The plan permits administrators to appropriately plan for and coordinate the use of special resources, such as extra technical expertise which may be difficult to obtain on short notice.
- The plan acts as an ongoing management tool for tracking and coordinating multiple activities.

WHAT TIME SCHEDULE WILL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES DEPEND UPON?

As with any project work plan, the evaluation resource plan should also include a specific schedule for the accomplishment of tasks. The scheduling dimension is important to the evaluation effort for a number of reasons:

Evaluation Timing and User Commitment: If not accomplished within a specified timeframe, evaluation results can go stale. The organizational momentum behind evaluation may die and the results, when finally produced, may no longer be valued or utilized. Over a period of time, the potential users of the evaluation may change substantially. New users may have less commitment or interest in the evaluation or may feel more threatened by the information evaluation elicits. For these reasons, user input may inform the scheduling, as well as content of the evaluation.

The Time Schedule as a Management Tool: Establishing a timeframe is also critical to the day-to-day management of the evaluation. Careful planning of the evaluation schedule, in anticipating problem areas and resource bottlenecks, will lead to more efficient resource utilization. A detailed timeframe also acts as a monitoring tool for keeping task accomplishment on schedule. However, the timeframe is only as good as the component task information of the resource plan. The more sketchy the resource plan, the more difficult to realistically allocate time and sequence evaluation activities. The evaluation resource plan (introduced earlier) can be easily expanded to include more specific scheduling information for managing the evaluation:

SAMPLE RESOURCE PLAN WITH TIMEFRAME

Activities	Dates	Staff Assignments	Staff Time (days)	Total Time Stf/Other
PHASE I: Planning				
(1) Collecting background information	2/1 - 2/10	Sanchez Johnson Heller	2 10 5	17/3
(2) Assessing evaluability	2/11 - 2/13	Johnson	2	2/2
(3) Formulating questions	2/13 - 2/18	Johnson Heller	5 2	7/.5

Time Schedule as a Coordination Tool: The scheduling of an evaluation should also mesh with relevant funding, legislative and planning timetables. For example, evaluation findings with implications for broad policy-making might ideally be coordinated with the policy timeframes of the PIC, economic development agencies, and local government. Evaluation plans might also be coordinated to inform allocation decisions for state set-aside monies or other state and local administrative actions. The important point in overall scheduling is to seize, wherever possible, important coordination opportunities with other actors within the total JTPA system. Such coordination can only enhance the ultimate utility of the evaluation effort.

HOW WILL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES BE MONITORED?

In scheduling evaluation activities, planners can build into the evaluation process opportunities for review, comment, and revision. These opportunities for monitoring significant phases of the evaluation can enhance the overall evaluation effort in several ways:

- Review opportunities build flexibility into the evaluation plan, allowing for changes and improvements where necessary.
- Review allows for alternative decision points to be scheduled into the evaluation process rather than forcing a decision before adequate information is available.
- Review, in encouraging the timely discovery and correction of research problems or planning gaps may ultimately save time and resources.
- External review by an independent third party can increase the user's confidence in and overall credibility of an in-house evaluation.

Review can be scheduled not only for the early planning phases of the evaluation, but also following later phases of implementation and final reporting. This kind of more comprehensive review offers insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation upon which recommendations for future evaluation activities can be based. (For more on formal evaluation review, or audit, see Chapter 10.) This chapter concludes with a sample checklist for reviewing an evaluation plan.

Reviewing Evaluation Plans.

In concluding this chapter with a plan review checklist, we come back full circle to the initial question posed: What does a good evaluation plan entail? The review example below suggests four separate frame works for assessing the adequacy of a plan: conceptual, organizational, research, and management.

COMPONENTS IN AN EVALUATION PLAN

Instructions: Rate your evaluation plan by checking the appropriate descriptive category for each component of the written plan.

	Well Defined	Partially Defined	Not Defined	Not Applicable
Conceptual Framework				
1. Statement of purpose(s) for the evaluation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Questions to be addressed?	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Users to be served?	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Potential users of the results?	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Overview of evaluation approach, research activities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Evaluation products expected?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organizational Framework				
7. Methods for assessing evaluability?	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Strategies for increasing leadership and organizational support for evaluation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Organizational factors affecting the location of evaluation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
a. Authority and compliance factors?	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Credibility factors?	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Neutrality and independence factors?	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Technical and other competency factors?	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Coordination capability factors?	☐	☐	☐	☐

PLAN COMPONENTS, Continued)

	Well Defined	Partially Defined	Not Defined	Not Applicable
10. User involvement and feedback?	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Educational and briefing activities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Advisory group participation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Community participation, community resource utilization?	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Evaluator role and responsibilities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Program staff roles and responsibilities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Mechanisms for interim feedback to users and program staff?	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Strategies for enhancing staff cooperation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. Intra- and interagency agreements for data/resource sharing?	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Dissemination strategy?	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. Confidentiality agreements and staff protections?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Research Framework

	Well Defined	Partially Defined	Not Defined	Not Applicable
21. Theoretical basis for research design?	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. Data gathering instruments?	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. Data gathering procedures?	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. Sampling strategy?	☐	☐	☐	☐
25. Data storage and retrieval procedures (including data merging procedures)?	☐	☐	☐	☐
26. Procedures for reviewing data reliability, validity, comparability?	☐	☐	☐	☐
27. Data analysis procedures?	☐	☐	☐	☐
28. Data interpretation methods?	☐	☐	☐	☐

PLAN COMPONENTS, Continued)

Management Framework	Well Defined	Partially Defined	Not Defined	Not Applicable
29. A dissemination plan for findings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
30. A plan for interim reports, briefings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
31. Sequential list of all evaluation planning tasks and activities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
32. Sequential list of all implementation tasks and activities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
33. Sequential list of all reporting and dissemination activities?	☐	☐	☐	☐
34. List of all products to be produced?	☐	☐	☐	☐
35. A timeframe for tasks and products completion?	☐	☐	☐	☐
36. Staff and other resources (facilities/equipment) needed for each task?	☐	☐	☐	☐
37. Procedures for contracting with a consultant?	☐	☐	☐	☐
38. Who will perform various tasks?	☐	☐	☐	☐
39. Job qualifications and job descriptions for staff?	☐	☐	☐	☐
40. Review procedures?	☐	☐	☐	☐
41. Policies and procedures affecting the evaluation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
42. Evaluation costs and benefits?	☐	☐	☐	☐
43. Budget allocations?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Adapted from: Kay Adams and Jerry Walker, Improving the Accountability of Career Education Programs: Evaluation Guidelines and Checklists, Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1979, p. 69.

CHAPTER 7
ESTIMATING EVALUATION COSTS AND BENEFITS

What Will an Evaluation Cost?
Can Evaluation Benefits Be Measured?
Will Benefits Outweigh Costs?

CHAPTER 7.

ESTIMATING EVALUATION COSTS AND BENEFITS

INTRODUCTION

These volumes on evaluating JTPA are premised on the notion that evaluation is an important management tool for decision-makers, and offers key benefits in terms of improved understanding and operation of JTPA. While perhaps easily accepting this premise in the abstract, JTPA decision-makers will want to know the bottom line in more concrete terms before committing to evaluation. How much will evaluation cost, and will the purported benefits outweigh the costs? The answers to such questions are usually not neat and straightforward: the benefit-cost calculation is often very elusive. In this chapter we examine briefly some of the issues associated with estimating the costs and benefits of evaluating JTPA.

WHAT WILL AN EVALUATION COST?

As is the case with any plan, estimating the costs of evaluation is a critical step in the planning process. Funders need a preliminary price tag before authorizing an evaluation effort, and as early as possible evaluation planners themselves will want to anchor evaluation options to concrete financial realities. The thorough costing of the major evaluation components provides a realistic basis for comparing evaluation alternatives and assessing the relative merits of different data collection and staffing strategies. An estimation of costs and benefits encourages planners to creatively rethink alternative resource and staffing strategies or consider one or more scaled down versions of the preliminary evaluation design.

Evaluation costs will vary tremendously depending on the purpose and scale of the evaluation effort, the kinds of resources an organization can marshal to do the evaluation, and the existing market cost for external resources, such as consultants. For example, consultant fees for an evaluation specialist may range from $100/day to $600/day, or more. Personal field interviews can cost from $100 to $500 per interview, depending on consultant fees and how difficult it is to locate an interviewee and collect the information. Sometimes reduced fees or in-kind contributions are available, altering the cost framework for evaluation substantially (see Chapter 9 on alternative funding options).

The preliminary resource plan provides a ready format for assessing evaluation costs. To the evaluation activities, schedules and resources columns is added an additional column for costs, as excerpted below:

SAMPLE RESOURCE PLAN WITH COSTS

Activities	Staff Time (days)	Total Time Stf/Other	Other Special Staff and Resources	Costs
PHASE I: Planning				
(1) Collecting background information	2 10 5	17/3	consultant (3 days)	Consultant: $250/day @ 3 days = $750
(2) Assessing evaluability	2	2/2	consultant (2 days)	Consultant: $300/day @ 2 days = $600
(3) Formulating questions	5 2	7/1/2	consultant review (.5 days)	Consultant: $250/day @ .5 days=$125
(4) Developing a design	2 7 7	16/3	borrow statistician from agency X for review (1 day); consult with programmar (2 days)	Agency statistician: $30/ hr x 8 = $240 (agency rate)
(5) Assigning and briefing staff/ developing resource plan	2 2	4/0		Agency programmer: $30/ hr x 16 = $480 (agency rate)

[Note: These hypothetical costs cited are only given as a general example of how costs must be linked to specific evaluation activities listed in a resource plan. The figures do not reflect actual costs and should not be taken as representative of evaluation costs in general.]

Counting All Evaluation Costs

The above example of evaluation costs is overly simplified in that it only lists obvious extra costs such as consultants. A truly effective cost assessment must include all costs borne by the sponsoring agencies or agency,[10] not just explicit dollar costs. Where in-kind resources such as staff time, computer time, administrative overhead and materials are shifted to an evaluation project, those resources should also be fully costed out. In such cases, it may be more convenient and meaningful to cost out some resources in other than dollar terms, such as staff hours to be donated to the evaluation. (Examples of various evaluation costs appear on the following page.)

Less Quantifiable Costs

Quantifiable costs, such as labor and materials, are only part of the total cost equation. These costs must be considered in concert with other, less definable costs. Examples of this more elusive category of costs might include the level of anticipated program disruption caused by the evaluation or resource losses associated with an inexperienced staff.

Perhaps some of these non-quantifiable costs can only be compared across different evaluation strategies in terms of the negative impacts on utilization. Consider the strategy of using in-house staff vs. outside consultants. In some cases, the former strategy may be much cheaper, but the results less credible to important funders or decision-makers. While not measurable, the potential costs of reduced credibility and utilization are nonetheless important to the overall cost calculus. The chart on the following page categorizes the various potential costs both quantifiable and not-so-quantifiable, associated with evaluation.

---

[10] Evaluation theorists hold divergent notions as to how costs should be calculated. See for example, Scriven, Michael, "Costs in Evaluation" in The Costs of Evaluation by Marvin C. Alkin and Lewis C. Solmon, eds. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983), pp. 27-44.

THE COSTS OF EVALUATION

Quantifiable Costs

Direct Costs	• Travel • Evaluation staff salaries/ benefits • Consultant fees • Per diem expenses • Telephone and mail • Computer time for data processing • Printing/duplication • Published materials • Supplies
Indirect Costs	Overhead • Facilities and space • Equipment rental, use and repair • Utilities • Administrative time Support Services • Secretarial/office • Accounting • Legal (e.g., contracting, client confidentiality issues, data use issues, etc.) • Public relations • Publishing

Non-Quantifiable Costs

Potential Costs to Staff and Clients	• Interagency coordination costs • Program disruptions • Service inefficiencies • Interview time
General Program-related Costs	• Credibility problems and costs • Mistakes, inefficiencies of inexperienced staff • Time delays • Staff resistance to evaluation • Inadequate or inappropriate utilization of evaluation results • Political costs

CAN EVALUATION BENEFITS BE MEASURED?

The costs of various evaluation strategies are most meaningfully interpreted in the context of comparative benefits to be derived from each strategy. However, evaluation benefits are far more resistant to comparative calculation than are costs. First, most potential benefits of evaluation are more difficult to measure or are intangible. The primary benefit of evaluation is better information about JTPA, but whether that information is well-utilized and leads to program improvements is another question. After-the-fact program improvements may be translated into quantifiable program gains (more clients referred, more clients served), but no such calculation can be made *prior* to the evaluation.

Second, the potential benefits of evaluation are often long-range and difficult to predict, not only in terms of degree of benefit, but also in terms of *who* will benefit. The benefits to be derived from evaluating a currently successful program may largely accrue in the future to entirely different programs in different local or state settings. Finally, evaluation may confer on an organization secondary benefits which are often not considered in the benefit-cost equation because they are by-products of the evaluation *process* rather than directly related to the evaluation findings. The following section discusses the notion of indirect benefits further.

Direct and Indirect Benefits of Evaluation

Anticipated central benefits of JTPA program evaluation will most often relate to better information leading to future improvements in program *efficiency* and *effectiveness*. These *direct benefits* of evaluation are explored in some detail in Chapter 1. In addition, the evaluation process may lead to certain organizational enhancements, or *indirect benefits*, which are not explicitly connected to JTPA goal achievement. For example, evaluation planning may result in better inter- and intra-agency communication and/or coordination in areas beyond JTPA evaluation. Evaluation implementation may result in an enhanced MIS or other data collection improvements. Examples of the various potential benefits (both direct and indirect) to be derived from evaluation are summarized on the following page.

BENEFITS OF EVALUATION

Direct Benefits to JTPA Programs	• Improved understanding of JTPA program activities and outcomes. • Increased accountability to program funders/public. • Recommendations for improved program efficiency and effectiveness. ° Information for JTPA planners and managers ° Information for JTPA policymakers ° Information which complements and moves beyond performance standards
Indirect Benefits to JTPA Organizations	• Improved intra- and interagency communication/coordination. • New contacts within the research and professional communities. • Enhanced "partnership" with business and professional groups. • New funding connections and capabilities. • Improved capabilities for doing future evaluation, including improved program evaluability. • Enhanced MIS or other data collection systems. • Improved data cleaning procedures. • Increased political credibility.
Indirect Benefits to Other Programs and Individuals	• Lessons learned from one evaluation setting applied to other settings. • Improved services to the intended target groups.
Indirect Social Benefits	• Increased public awareness of and support for JTPA.

WILL BENEFITS OUTWEIGH COSTS?

Those who are looking for concrete benefit-cost decision rules for doing (or not doing) a JTPA evaluation will remain disappointed. We can take some comfort in the fact that cost factors are relatively discrete and quantifiable, allowing decision-makers to more readily compare costs of competing evaluation alternatives (and, or course, competing non-evaluation uses of resources). The difficulties come in plugging evaluation benefits into the equation; how can one assign measurable value to the various informational and organizational benefits a JTPA evaluation can yield? Evaluation clearly does not lend itself to any straightforward balancing of numerical costs and benefits to see which outweighs the other.

However, the inability to assign costs and benefits along the same quantitative dimensions does not preclude the use of cost and benefit information in choosing whether and/or what kind of evaluation alternative to pursue. Even if evaluation benefits are more subjectively assessed, it is still important to establish how evaluation costs stack up against those benefits. As with costs, the resource plan provides the starting point for developing a checklist of benefits. (Direct benefits being related to the kinds of information outcomes provided by the evaluation and indirect benefits resulting from the evaluation process itself, as illustrated on the previous page.)

If alternative evaluation strategies are being considered, a thorough checklist of benefits for each alternative provides a richer context for weighing costs. In order to more closely compare different clusters of benefits, decision-makers can assign weights to each benefit as a rough way of measuring each benefit's intrinsic value to the evaluation user(s). Each evaluation alternative could then be measured in terms of a total benefit "score", as well as total evaluation cost. The more costly evaluation alternative may provide unique and highly valued benefits which significantly outstrip the potential benefits offered by less costly approaches.

CONCLUSION

The cost of an evaluation is an immediate an inescapable concern for the JTPA planner and decision-maker. Is the evaluation doable, or will it cost too much? Often, however, this full scrutiny of evaluation costs is not equally applied to evaluation benefits. Although benefits may be less quantifiable and more subjectively felt than costs, they are nonetheless real, substantial and important in providing a fuller context for assessing costs.

In assessing costs and benefits, planners have to remain open to creative alternatives for carrying out a JTPA evaluation so that they do not feel locked in to a single, too costly plan. The next section explores some JTPA evaluation staffing and funding alternatives.

SECTION 4
IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The preceding chapters trace the JTPA evaluation planning process, blending implementation issues into that process. How the evaluation will be conducted, who will be involved, what information will be gathered—these are all implementation issues that must be imbedded within the overall evaluation plan. The separation between planning issues and implementation issues is a somewhat artificial one, made here for clarity's sake. This final section pulls out three critical areas of evaluation implementation for closer examination: *data collection issues, staffing concerns* and *funding options.*

CHAPTER 8
COLLECTING AND USING DATA

What Is the Quality of the Data?
Data Reliability
Data Validity
Data Comparability

Are the Data Available?

Will Different Data Sets Need to Be Merged?

How Will Client Confidentiality Be Handled?

CHAPTER 8.

COLLECTING AND USING DATA

INTRODUCTION

Whether data are derived from an MIS or other automated data base systems, access to accurate and valid data is a key consideration in designing and implementing any evaluation. Without adequate data, the most beautifully designed evaluation is worthless. Evaluators should not wait until the final design and implementation stage of an evaluation to plow through data gathering systems and be confronted with their inadequacies. Rather, these systems should be explored and their insufficiencies uncovered in the early evaluation planning stages.

Many considerations besides analytical needs (e.g., political, technical, ethical) go into the design of a data collection system. As a result, each system uniquely delimits what information can immediately feed into evaluation. Given this diversity in MIS and other data systems across states and SDAs, the purpose in this chapter is to highlight those major data issues relevant to many JTPA programs. As with other evaluation concerns presented in this volume, data collection issues have not only a technical face, but an organizational face as well. Each of the following issues will be discussed in turn.:

- **What is the quality of the data?**
- **Are the necessary data available?**
- **Will different data sets need to be merged?**
- **How will client confidentialty be handled?**

A more detailed discussion of MIS capabilities important to evaluation activities will be presented in a later publication in this volume series.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THE DATA?

For both monitoring and evaluation purposes, a primary concern is the quality of the data. Quality rests principally on the reliability, validity, and comparability of the MIS and other data sets to be used in evaluation.

Data Reliability

Reliability has to do with the accuracy and consistency with which data have been collected. In the MIS, for example, there are several major sources of unreliable data: (1) the client himself or herself; (2) the staff who are recording information on the client; (3) the data entry staff transferring that information; (4) system classification schemes which do not clearly or consistently distinguish one data element category from another. In SDAs with highly decentralized intake and service delivery systems, the potential for data inconsistencies and inaccuracies is multiplied. In preparation for evaluation, planners can review data collection procedures and safeguards, recommending additional safeguards if necessary.

Data Validity

A related issue is that of measurement validity: Do the data elements required in the evaluation truly measure what they are supposed to measure? For example, do simple "wages" truly represent "earnings" (the outcome JTPA legislation mandates for study)? If data on wages alone is used as an outcome measurement, other earnings, such as fringe benefits and tips, may be ignored. The analysis guides for net impact, gross impact, and process evaluation in Volumes 3, 4, and 5) deal further with validity issues in the specific measurement context of each approach.

Data Comparability

Data collected within a single state or SDA may sufficiently meet standards of reliability and validity but still not be useful for JTPA program comparisons across states, SDAs, and even service providers.

In order to evaluate implementation practices and outcomes within a broader state or regional context, the definitions of various MIS data elements need to be reasonably standardized. Achieving such standardization across different jurisdictions often proves to be a complicated task, especially in states which operate a more decentralized MIS system.

Where JTPA services are decentralized through numerous separate contractors, the issue of data comparability extends all the way down to the service provider level. When the SDA (or proxy agency like the Employment Service) performs centralized intake and service assignment, it can perhaps exert more control over how participant information is categorized and codified in the MIS. But where these initial service functions are relinquished to independent contractors, standardization of information is more difficult to maintain. Rigorous categorizing and coding guidelines for contractors may not exist or, if they do exist, they may be hard to enforce at the contractor level.

It is in the comparison of different program service strategies or treatments that MIS data comparability is often most questionable. National reporting requirements have led to states and SDAs collecting fairly standardized information about JTPA enrollments, terminations and primary client characteristics. But because such reporting requirements are lacking for program variables (e.g., type of treatment, length of treatment), treatment data can be much less uniform across states, SDAs and their individual service providers.

When no standardized MIS definitions and coding guidelines exist, the definitions for various program treatments may be applied in non-standardized ways at every JTPA level--state, SDA, and individual service provider. Consider the category "pre-employment training." One service provider may lump into this category clients who are given a half-day course on job search techniques, along with clients taking a comprehensive three-week course. Another provider may categorize only the latter activity as "training", and regard the first activity primarily as "placement." This comparability problem will extend down to the individual service provider level in highly decentralized SDA where services are largely contracted out to numerous providers.

Multiple treatment strategies may further complicate matters because of the added problem of defining which category gets credit for a resultant positive outcome. Crediting only the final treatment, as do some SDAs or their contractors, leads to a distortion of program outcomes: the success rate of the final treatment (often OJT) may appear greater than it actually merits because the costs per placement may be artificially deflated. Conversely, the costs per placement for all the more preparatory kinds of treatments (such as adult basic education, or skills training) may be over-inflated, making these treatments appear less attractive.

If MIS coding for these kinds of treatment variables are not standardized, a SDA wishing to include such variables in an evaluation will have to establish clear guidelines for assigning treatment data to categories. Service providers may then be better able to translate their own coded data more appropriately to fit SDA definitions.

ARE THE DATA AVAILABLE?

In any state or local setting, the MIS, providing continuously generated information on a number of important client and implementation variables, will be a key factor in the evaluation. Besides data quality and comparability, a primary concern must be MIS sufficiency to meet the important data requirements of evaluation. What demands, in fact, will evaluation place on the MIS? The different evaluation approaches presented in this series have different information requirements which are detailed in each of the separate volumes of JTPA Evaluation at the Local Level. (In addition, a more specific discussion of the kinds of MIS capabilities which are desirable for JTPA evaluation will be provided in a forthcoming paper of this project.)

In general, however, the various evaluation approaches will require the following basic categories of MIS data:

MIS DATA FOR EVALUATION

1. Client characteristics
    - Age
    - Sex
    - Race
    - Etc.

2. Service data
    - Type of treatment
    - Length of treatment

3. Termination data

4. Follow-up data
    - Client data
    - Additional services

5. Employer data
    - Employer I.D. information
    - Employer services information
    - Employer follow-up

6. SDA/Community characteristics

7. Financial data

If the MIS lacks certain data elements useful to evaluation, how readily can the system be revised? It may be more cost-effective in the long-run to hammer out a thorough revision based on multiple evaluation uses, rather than slowly attack a system piecemeal.

The cost of adding elements to the MIS is an obvious constraint to modifying the system. In the more decentralized state settings where SDAs operate independent software or mainframe systems, individual modifications may be especially costly because the states are likely to bear less responsibility for locally-run information systems. But computer programming time is not the only cost issue involved in acquiring new data for evaluation. SDAs need to be sensitive to the potential burdens that added reporting requirements will place on themselves and their service providers (designing new forms, training intake personnel, etc.). Also, there is a limit to how much research information an SDA or service provider can collect without compromising its social service mission. Therefore, part of initial evaluation planning must involve the integration of evaluation's MIS requirements into the SDA's overall information needs.

In the more centralized state MIS systems, an SDA will have less latitude in independently modifying its MIS. Longer range planning for evaluation activities may entail bringing in the state and other SDAs to develop an MIS capability oriented towards local level evaluation needs. However, SDAs may have different information priorities from each other and from the state, complicating the task of enhancing the MIS to meet diverse evaluation needs. In some instances SDAs have collectively negotiated changes in proposed statewide evaluation to include gathering more information of direct concern to the SDAs.

WILL DIFFERENT DATA SETS NEED TO BE MERGED?

While MIS information will often be at the core of many JTPA evaluations, additional information may also be critical. For example, merging MIS client data with other kinds of client data on post-JTPA earnings, employment and welfare dependency permits a more sophisticated analysis of program outcomes and impacts.

Frequently this additional kind of data is contained in data base systems completely separate and incompatible with the JTPA MIS. The evaluation plan should anticipate the technical difficulties to be overcome in bringing various data systems together for a unitary analysis.

Technical difficulties in merging data are not confined to the managing of different computer systems and programs; the data itself may present stumbling blocks. For example, in some states the category "disadvantaged" is not flagged in the Employment Service registrants data base used in the net impact evaluation to construct a comparison group. Lacking this category, it will be more difficult to match and compare JTPA participants with similar groups of non-participants. (See Volume 5, Chapter 4 for an in-depth treatment of this concern.)

The task of merging MIS with other kinds of data can involve organizational considerations, as well. The data may be under another agency's authority, and obtaining that data may pose additional challenges. Commonly, data requests across agency boundaries are viewed as an imposition, requiring extra staff time or other resources. If the lines of communication between agencies are poor, the data collection effort may suffer.

Moreover, the agency may be under state rather than local jurisdiction (e.g., welfare). There may, in this case, be less organizational precedence or support for interaction and cooperation with the SDA. If state JTPA administrators are also interested in the non-JTPA data for their own purposes, it may be easier for the SDA to work through the state JTPA auspices to obtain the data.

Such realities underscore the need for strategic organizational planning as part of the overall evaluation planning effort. Representatives of affected agencies should be brought into the planning process early to ensure greater cooperation. Any interagency understandings about data sharing and computer use should be put in writing as further insurance against future frustrations and misunderstanding.

HOW WILL CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY BE HANDLED?

Although state agencies and SDAs may routinely share JTPA client information, client confidentiality is not an issue as long as that information is presented in the aggregate without individual identifiers, such as client name or social security number. However, both the net and gross impact evaluations involve the merging of MIS data with other sources of data for which client identifiers are required to accomplish the match of information.

To implement an evaluation, two or more separate agencies may have to share JTPA data flagged with client identifies. Each agency may have its own internal standards regarding client data access and use. For example, one agency may strictly limit information containing client identifiers to a small number of special users, while others may allow wide access to such information. Some agencies may permit client data to be used for compliance investigation and others may not. In such cases, interagency discussion and agreement about client confidentiality must be part of the evaluation planning effort.

Assurances about client confidentiality may be especially important to SDAs and service providers. Inability to ensure client confidentiality may impair the client-service-provider relationship and subsequently impact treatment success. Breaches in client confidentiality may also discourage eligibles from participating in JTPA. For these reasons, policies regarding the use of evaluation data need to be established in advance.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation findings are only as good as the information foundation they rest on. If data are incomplete, unreliable or inaccessible, evaluation resources may be unnecessarily wasted or the evaluation's utility substantially compromised. As a preventative measure, the evaluation plan should incorporate a review of relevant data collection procedures and data access systems. Such a review addresses not only *methodological* concerns (data accuracy, reliability, validity, comparability) and *technical* concerns (data availability, computer capabilities), but also *organizational* concerns (data sharing, client confidentiality). In meeting these concerns, an SDA is not only better prepared to implement evaluation, but also enjoys certain long-term benefits in terms of increased data-collection efficiency and accuracy affecting other oversight and research activities.

CHAPTER 9
FUNDING A JTPA EVALUATION

What Are JTPA-Related Sources of Funding?
What are Other Sources of Funding?
What Funding Strategy Should be Pursued?

CHAPTER 9.

FUNDING A JTPA EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

While JTPA legislation supports various evaluation activities, no specific funds are allocated to this purpose. As long as administrative funds remain so limited, finding financial support for JTPA evaluation will be a fundamental concern for most states and SDAs.

The purpose of this chapter is to encourage local JTPA planners and decision-makers to think broadly and creatively about funding possibilities for JTPA evaluation. The JTPA's orientation toward public-private collaboration in addressing employment and training needs sets the stage for exploring new funding partnerships in the evaluation of JTPA programs. Before examining these new partnership possibilities, we briefly outline various sources of support for evaluation within JTPA.

WHAT ARE JTPA-RELATED SOURCES OF FUNDING?

Under current JTPA formula-funding levels, most SDA's internal resources for doing evaluation will be limited. Beyond the 15% administrative monies allowable under the Act, SDAs may want to explore pooling administrative resources from other pots of JTPA money to carry out evaluation activities.

JTPA Special Set-Asides

In looking for sources of evaluation funding, an obvious place to start is with the JTPA state set-asides designated for special administratative and other activities. In many states, SDAs are moving towards collective negotiation and cooperative decision-making as to how these state funds might be allocated. While use of these funds for evaluation may be restricted in various ways, a portion of the six percent, three percent and eight percent pots of money might arguably be applied to pertinent evaluation efforts. The evaluation-related possibilities for each of these set-asides are outlined here.

- Six Percent Set-Aside:
  Much debate has already ensued around the appropriate use of six percent monies for technical assistance to SDAs. The debate centers around what, precisely, "technical assistance" (a term not specifically defined in the legislation) can encompass. Is evaluation an acceptable form of technical assistance? In the past, the Department of Labor (DOL) has questioned the use of six percent monies for state evaluation activities because the legislation directs states to offer technical assistance to those individual SDAs who are failing to meet performance standards. As of this writing, however, DOL has not taken a firm position, allowing states discretion on this issue.

  Using this discretion, some states have interpreted the six percent more broadly to allow for evaluation. The argument here is three-fold: First, states cannot adequately develop technical assistance packages to SDAs without first having a means to assess what is or is not effective about JTPA both generally and specifically at the SDA program level. Evaluation activities provide the necessary information base for implementing useful technical assistance.

  Second, the legislation intended performance standards measures to be selective indicators of how well JTPA programs are meeting certain goals, not comprehensive measures of JTPA goal achievement. Therefore, the purpose of technical assistance activities such as evaluation need not be directly and narrowly tied to improving performance measures, but rather should be related to improving the program's effectiveness in meeting its intended goals.

  Finally, evaluation helps spot program difficulties before they are reflected in performance measures, allowing for more timely correction of problems. Evaluation therefore, may be viewed as "preventative" technical assistance to SDAs who might otherwise fail to meet standards.

  Pending a restrictive federal definition of technical assistance and the circumstances under which such assistance can be provided, states and SDAs might explore the use of six percent set aside monies for supporting evaluation activities as a form of technical assistance.

- Eight Percent Set-Aside:
  JTPA requires that eight percent of state funds be set aside for state education and coordination activities. While in many instances, states are retaining complete control over these funds, in other cases, states are using SDAs as conduit for the

funds going to special contractors. Since up to one-fifth of these funds may go towards enhancing JTPA coordination, local JTPA administrators may be able to make a case for tapping a portion of these funds to do evaluation which focuses on program coordination aspects of concern to both SDAs and the state.

- Three Percent Set-Aside:
  Three percent of state administrative funds are set aside for special programs and services to disadvantaged older workers. This is the smallest pot of state set-aside monies, and where program funds are funneled through the SDAs the 15 percent administrative restriction applies. Nonetheless, in some instances, it may be feasible to use a percentage of these funds to evaluate special JTPA activities for older workers.

Title III Funds

In many states, the SDA role in Title III has been fairly limited. But since some SDAs manage Title III programs, and SDAs in general are increasingly interested in participating more fully in such programs, some thoughts on Title III evaluation funding are included here.

Both Title III formula funding and discretionary funding allow significant administrative flexibility to support evaluation activities. In order to receive formula-allocated funds, states must match federal funds with their own program funds or in-kind support. In states with greater unemployment, the match requirement is proportionately reduced. While 70 percent of funds must go to direct service, this limitation applies only to federal funds and only up to 50 percent of all program funds combined. These provisions give states and SDAs considerable latitude to incorporate evaluation into Title III activities. Evaluation costs may be counted as state match money; more liberal limits on administrative costs in general make support for evaluation more feasible.

Title III discretionary funds which the Secretary of Labor manages are to support special state training programs in areas of high unemployment, plant closures and mass layoffs. Since no state match money is required and no specific legislative limitations are placed on these funds, states and SDAs have a special opportunity to integrate evaluation into training programs sponsored by these funds. Because state and local program activities geared towards dislocated workers are a relatively new phenomenon, the rationale for building evaluation into these activities is particularly strong.

State Technical Assistance

State JTPA agencies are likely to have a more centralized and developed research capability than are their local counterparts. As states and SDAs better define their respective roles and relationships to each other, there will perhaps be increasing latitude for state-local cooperative evaluation activities. Many states are in a good position to offer valuable technical assistance and special services to SDAs contemplating JTPA program evaluation. SDAs may want to explore specific forms of state technical assistance as a way to partially underwrite an evaluation effort.

Interagency Funding

As well as state-local cooperative evaluation efforts, SDAs might want to explore funding leveraged from other local agencies or governmental units participating in JTPA (e.g., local welfare office, economic development agencies, city community development offices, etc.). Trans-agency supported evaluation might focus more on issues of administration and service coordination of importance to the several constituent funders. With joint funding for a particular evaluation or for ongoing evaluation activities, an independent evaluation unit attached to the PIC or to a supra-agency, such as the mayor's office may be acceptable to all parties. Whatever the organizational arrangement, evaluation activities will have to answer needs and provide recognized benefits to a broad spectrum of various agency participants.

WHAT ARE OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING?

Resources for evaluation funding exist beyond the previously mentioned government funding sources connected directly or indirectly to JTPA. But state and local agencies have historically been reluctant to tap these outside resources (and in the time of more munificent public budgets, there was perhaps little reason to explore them). Finding and approaching these other funders can require a staffing and time investment for busy administrators that initially discourages this kind of organizational risk-taking.

Ultimately, however, casting a broader net into funding realms beyond the familiar can pay off in many ways. Even if adventuresome searchers are not directly rewarded with the cash support they seek, the effort may still prove valuable in terms of non-monetary contributions, increased contacts and interactions within the business, academic and professional communities, increased program visibility and credibility, and enlarged possibilities for future funding. The remainder of the chapter outlines some of these alternative funding possibilities.

Universities and 4-year Colleges

Academic institutions can often offer unique evaluation resources at reduced costs. First, a major academic resource is faculty who may have the specialized research expertise needed, and are often available at a reduced cost compared to private consultants. Through their institutional ties, faculty are sometimes better able to leverage related research resources (such as research materials, computer expertise, other faculty and students). If the faculty consultant time commitment is below a certain amount, academic institutions will often reduce or waive their indirect costs.

Students are another potential source of support for evaluation. Frequently, graduate students are willing to devote research time to an outside evaluation project in order to gain practical work experience (encouraged or required by many professional graduate schools) or to develop material for a thesis or doctoral project. Sometimes students (as well as faculty) can partially or fully support their evaluation research activities through research assistantships, post-doctoral fellowships or individual research grants. While very limited, federal work study funds do exist at the graduate level, allowing employers to pay only a portion of the wage costs of a work study student. An added plus is that students bring with them the advice, interest and support of supervising faculty who can act as an additional quality control on the student's work, and who themselves may be willing to play an active role in the evaluation effort, contributing specialized expertise.

State-supported educational institutions (including community colleges) are also part of the state agency network. Their public-sector status provides an opportunity and rationale for developing closer ties that can be mutually beneficial to both parties. In terms of hiring a JTPA evaluation consultant, contracting with state-supported colleges or universities may be simpler, less formal, and involve lower indirect costs than would other contracting arrangements.

For a variety of reasons, academic departments are frequently interested in setting up formal ties with agencies sponsoring research projects. Such ties might take the form of special internships for qualified students or reduced-fee faculty consulting. In some cases, graduate departments or professional schools may partially or fully fund studies of evaluation issues of special relevance to their faculty and students. One local JTPA evaluation, for instance, was largely sponsored by a nearby university's graduate business school. Faculty and SDA staff planned the evaluation; students collected and analyzed data under faculty supervision. When collaboration with a university is more formalized, faculty are more likely to play an active role in screening and supervising students.

Special Organizations

A number of non-profit business, labor, professional, social service and public interest organizations have a special interest in evaluating and thereby improving employment and training programs. A JTPA evaluation may be able to capitalize on this interest in a number of ways. For example, members of such groups might act as formal or informal advisors to the evaluation planning process. Members might be willing to offer reduced fee services or provide certain resources in exchange for public recognition of their contributions. The National Alliance of Business (NAB), for example, has contributed to local JTPA evaluation activities. Other organizations might also be willing to lend various forms of support.

Private Foundations, Charitable Organizations and Trusts

Private foundation support used to be almost entirely the preserve of educational institutions and non-profit organizations. Increasingly, however, public agencies have broadened their funding strategies to include soliciting foundations for support. Nor is foundation support limited to direct services; many foundations are concerned with developing innovative approaches to service delivery and are willing to fund applied research activities (such as evaluation) in a number of service areas, including employment and training.

Most major metropolitan libraries carry standard directories (refer to the reference section for examples of these directories) profiling the larger national and regional foundations and their giving patterns. Regional directories of state and local funders are also usually available. Such directories provide initial information needed to identify those funders who are most likely to be interested in social program evaluation activities and in employment and training issues.

The major directories include fairly detailed and historical profiles on foundation activities (previous funding patterns, kinds of costs covered, special requirements, current recipients of support), which help the researcher quickly narrow the search effort. Financial reports of foundations, charities, and trusts within a state also give a good sense of who and what these organizations fund, their funding philosophy and agenda. (These reports are generally available through the state attorney general's office or the state agency which oversees the financial reporting of charitable organizations.)

These funders may be more attracted to programs which are innovative or can serve as demonstration models for other programs. Evaluation of programs geared to special populations (e.g., youth, ex-offenders, welfare recipients, older workers) may also resonate with certain funders who otherwise would not be involved with JTPA evaluation activities.

Size and location of foundations are often important considerations. Smaller and more local foundations may be more unpredictable in their outlook, but they will also be more geared to local actors and interests. They may support an especially appealing local project outside their usual framework.

In contrast, the larger national foundations are more bureaucratic, engage in a very formalized selection of issues to be funded, have more specifically defined application procedures and fixed funding parameters, and apply more rigid criteria in making funding decisions. Larger foundations also tend to have lengthy timeframes for review and final decision-making. The trade-off is that major foundation support, while more competitively sought, more difficult and time-consuming to achieve, offers larger pots of money, greater prestige and increased likelihood of supplemental funding in the future. Therefore, while an SDA's best chances for funding may be at the local level, the fund seeker should not automatically preclude national and state funders.

Private Business Sector

JTPA envisions a close working relation between government and the private sector to better connect those who are being trained with those who can offer jobs. In the interest of learning more about and improving current JTPA operations, the public-private partnership might arguably be extended to include joint support for evaluation activities.

Large companies utilizing JTPA services such as OJT may be particularly receptive to requests for assistance in evaluating and improving those services. (More support may be available if the company also views its participation in terms of public relations returns.) While local service agencies may be unaccustomed to approaching the private sector directly for help, a mechanism for making such contacts is built into JTPA through the PICs. The project which sponsored this set of evaluation guidebooks is a prime example of how private businesses may join with the public sector in supporting evaluation activities.

In addition to approaching business contacts through JTPA channels, other sources of information on private sector companies are available to help in the fund search. State employment agencies, economic development organizations and private research companies often publish information on the largest employers in the state. Also, major university and public libraries usually carry reference guides on corporations in each state, which describe their giving programs. (See the final section for specific references.)

Local companies can be contacted directly for information about their funding interests and requirements. Usually, the funding proposals do not need to be as long or as complex as with other funders and the decision time is much shorter.

With major national corporations, the scenario can be quite different. They often have special (usually non-local) corporate giving units that handle all funding requests, often requiring somewhat more sophisticated and detailed proposals. While these special units may make the final selections, local corporate branches may also wish to be involved in the review process and may have influence over the ultimate funding decision of corporate headquarters.

WHAT FUNDING STRATEGY SHOULD BE PURSUED?

Funding sources of all kinds have reduced their giving programs over the past few years. Creative, imaginative and well thought-out funding strategies have always made a difference, but now they are imperative. In the present period of scarcity and shifting social welfare values, funding social services is a genuine challenge. It is also increasingly difficult to locate funders with a special interest in the assessment of employment and training efforts. Therefore, the fund searcher must build maximum efficiency into the fund search effort. Following are some strategies for developing JTPA funding proposals and increasing the likelihood of their success.

1. Identify potential funders of policy research, particularly ongoing program evaluation or the evaluation of pilot and demonstration programs in the human services.

The economics and business sections of most public libraries have excellent books on foundations and corporations, produced by major fund search organizations and publishers of business/industrial directories. Repositories for government documents in colleges, universities, and state libraries have information on government funders. The Grants and Contracts Weekly and The Business and Commerce Daily are the most current sources of information on government funding priorities. Automated searches, now availble at a low cost to government agencies, provide quick sources of information on a range of private and public sector funders. A large pool of "possible" funders can therefore be compiled from the rich resources now readily available.

2. Develop fund search criteria, which help you narrow fund search efforts to the most likely funders.

One way to economise in the search effort is to narrow these possible funders to the probable ones, and the probable to the most likely, prior to any extensive fund search effort. To conserve energy, it is helpful to first become as knowledgable as possible about 1) the characteristics of what you want funded, and 2) the characteristics of the potential funders you have sifted out in your first review, and then apply these criteria as a guide in matching your project's features with the most likely subgroup of funders for that particular project. Some useful criteria are listed below.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING FUNDERS

Project Characteristics

- The purpose of the evaluation
- The primary issues to be investigated
- The kinds of groups and/or organizations to be studied
- The nature of the sponsor of the evaluation activities
- The context in which the evaluation is to be carried out
- The kind of support already acquired for the evaluation

Characteristics of Potential Funder

- The funder's source of funds
- The size of the funder's total giving program, and the average amount contributed to any given recipient
- The funder's relationship to the source of its funds
- The public/private status of the funder
- The funder's size and level of bureaucratization
- The funder's historical and current funding pattern with respect to:
    - The kinds of issues emphasized
    - the types of recipients funded
    - the degree of formality, sophistication, and complexity of application, review and selection processes
- The geographic diversity of the recipients

3. Develop a General Fund Search Strategy.

Work plans and timeframes are generic to government. They are just as necessary for fund search as for the development of the projects for which funding is sought. Although in the final analysis, such plans and timetables must be tailored to different funders, it is helpful to begin with an overall strategy which is modifiable. Such a stategy has at least the following elements:

- The preparation and/or acquisition of basic fund search materials
- The preparation of a general description of the project to be funded
- The securing of general letters of support for the project, from individuals whose endorsement will likely increase the credibility of the funding request.
- The preparation of a general cover letter to accompany these materials
- The development of a chronological work plan and timeframe for obtaining funds, based on considerations of staff resources, time pressures, the need to acquire funds from more than one source, the ability to maintain organizational support from the project sponsor over time, the realities of governmental and nongovernmental funding cycles, and other organizational and political considerations.

4. Fine-tune the materials to each of a small set of top priority funders within the "likely" group.

The most important aspect of tailoring a funding request is to achieve an honest mesh between the characteristics of the proposed project and the current priorities of the funder (and to a lesser extent the funder's historical giving pattern). The goal is to construct an individualized funding rationale for each potential funder to be approached.

5. Decide which is more appropriate: A single-funder or multi-funder approach.

If the latter, each funder should be informed in the cover letter what others are being simultaneously approached. Learning this from other funders is often the kiss of death for a funding application. A staggered approach to multiple funders may in some cases be the best method. Securing one major funder may tend to leverage funds from the others. Corporate givers may be resistant to being the only private funder; a multi-funder strategy should consider incoroporating more than one private funding proposal.

6. Update critical information on the funder(s) selected for the first phase of the fund search.

You may need to solicit fresh information on funders through personal contact with an individual within the funding organization who is in a position to give you the information you need relative to the kind of project being proposed. It is wise, however, not to identify the project or its sponsor at this point, since this can affect funding decisions prematurely. Rather, this should be a general information-gathering call, confined to questions such as:

- What are the funding application guidelines and procedures?
- Where and to whom does one submit an application for funds? (Application materials should be requested, since many funders require a high level of conformance with their formal procedures.)
- What are the current funding priorities? (Some corporations and smaller foundations will not tell you. The larger foundations have elaborate booklets outlining and justifying their current areas of interest.)
- How flexible is the application process?
- What additional factors may feed into the selection process?
- Are public sector programs likely to be considered seriously for awards?
- Who is the best contact person for following up on the status of an application?
- What other kinds of things will the funder look for in an application?

In studying these specific characteristics of funders, searchers will then be better able to further narrow the fund search to a few select and optimal choices.

7. Identify special internal resources and capabilities.

As part of a well-crafted proposal, a fund-seeker will want to emphasize those specific organizational resources and capabilities which will positively affect the evaluation process. Funders will be looking for special characteristics that set the fund-seeking organization apart, characteristics that suggest the organization will be able to carry out the proposal in a successful, effective manner.

For example, many funders are impressed with proposals that appear to marshal effective community support or involvement or that have already obtained contingency funding from other sources. Also, some funders may favorably view projects for which consultants or in-house staff with requisite training and experience for the project have already been identified by fund-seekers.

8. Develop cooperative relations with organizations which can act as funding brokers.

Private sector funders at any level are likely to be resistant to funneling support directly to public sector agencies or local governmental units. JTPA fund searchers will therefore, want to explore the use of "funding brokers" for their proposals. Such brokers might include relevant university departments, research institutes, or an appropriate non-profit organization which agrees to pass through the funds to the SDA. In exchange, the broker may expect some level of participation in the project or may charge for indirect costs in acting as a funding conduit.

9. Solicit powerful advocates who can call or write to the funder on behalf of the project at an appropriate point in the review process.

This is a sensitive issue which must be carefully handled and timed. Too much and too little advocacy can be a problem.

10. Submit funding applications to the preferred funders, followed by a call to contacts within the funding organization to check on their receipt of the application and to clarify the review and selection process.

Applications can take the form of finely crafted cover letters accompanying long proposals conforming to a myriad of strict guidelines, or they can involve brief cover letters oriented to the funder's primary funding purposes accompanying a short concise concept paper on the project and why it is in the interest of the funder to support it. Whatever the format, the rationale for a particular funder to support a project must be clearly presented.

11. **Wait patiently for an acknowledgement that your application has been received and for most of the review process to have taken place, and then implement an advocacy effort.**

Most large foundations politely notify the applicant and keep the fund-searcher informed about the process. Most corporations do not. Smaller foundations and employers are often very amenable to calls from applicants.

The source of advocacy is important. Pressure from elected officials may work well with government agencies but not necessarily with private foundations or corporations. Local foundations are affected by advocacy from the client groups involved, or from client advocacy groups in the community.

12. **If the first wave of fund search activities fail, select another set from the "likely" pool and begin again.**

You will want to seek information on why the first choices turned you down. This may help you revise your concept papers and proposals, as you tailor them for new funders. In gearing up for another round, you may want to consider a different kind of funder- smaller, or closer to the project, or go the other direction. You may prefer a private/public partnership strategy this time, if you tried for a single funder the first time. Skill, imagination, flexibility, patience, and confidence in you project are essential in modifying your general funding strategy to accomodate for the normal series of wins and losses in fund search.

CONCLUSION

For many SDAs interested in evaluating JTPA, funding will be an important preliminary hurdle to negotiate. While new evaluation responsibilities have fallen on SDAs, traditional government funding sources under JTPA are far more limited than in the days of CETA. As a result, funding strategies may have to rest more on combining financial and in-kind support from several funding sources. Various JTPA-related administrative pots of money are obvious sources for partial funding of limited JTPA evaluation activities. For some SDAs, joint funding arrangements within or across JTPA-involved agencies may prove the most feasible way to sustain an ongoing evaluation capability.

Non-traditional funding sources should not be overlooked. Public sector administrators, generally unaccustomed to venturing beyond government funding options, will clearly have to move towards engaging support outside as well as inside the public sector. Universities, professional and community organizations, business and labor groups, private foundations and corporations may represent important untapped resources for carrying out JTPA evaluation.

CHAPTER 10

STAFFING A JTPA EVALUATION

Will Evaluation Require Special Staffing?

Who Should Staff an Evaluation?
The In-House Spproach
The Outside Consultant Strategy
Compromise Strategies

Consultants: What Are the Options?
Finding and Selecting a Consultant
Contract Concerns

CHAPTER 10.

STAFFING A JTPA EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

Because each SDA will have its own evaluation interests and needs, every evaluation effort will be somewhat unique; no single staffing pattern suffices for all. In some settings, an in-house team of evaluation specialists is most feasible; in other contexts, an outside consultant may make more sense. Each approach has potential advantages and disadvantages which will be outlined later in this chapter. An important consideration is whether available in-house staff have the technical skills to accomplish the kinds of evaluation tasks that are required. In addressing this consideration, we look first at some of the specialized staffing needs an evaluation might entail.

WILL EVALUATION REQUIRE SPECIAL STAFFING?

Comprehensive evaluations will likely require evaluation specialists in areas such as research design and statistical analysis; more scaled-down efforts might manage with fewer expert resources acting in a more limited consultant fashion. Whatever the scale, most evaluations will require some special staffing. The charts which follow present a rough notion of the sorts of special staffing needs an evaluation might engender:

CORE EVALUATION STAFF

Type of Specialist	Examples of Specialist Activities
Program Evaluator (specializing in employment and training programs)	Develops and implements a feasible overall evaluation approach (the questions to be investigated) and methodology to meet the information needs of a state or SDA.
Coordinator of Evaluation Activities	Coordinates activities in support of evaluation. Assesses the supports and constraints for conducting evaluation; develops strategies for increasing the utility and utilization of evaluation. Coordinates activities across agency and division boundaries. Plans and/or coordinates resource utilization, staffing, and other implementation components of the evaluation.
MIS Programmer/ Analyst	Develops programs needed for merging categorical data from different sources. Creates customized data sets for analysis purposes and does data analysis under the supervision of the program evaluator.
Surveyor, Interviewer or other Data Collectors	Carries out the actual collection of information required by the evaluation research approach.

ADDITIONAL EVALUATION SPECIALISTS

Type of Specialist	Examples of of Specialist Activities
Evaluation Researcher (specializing in evaluability assessment)	Determines the feasibility of carrying out different kinds of program evaluations, given a state or SDA's evaluation needs.
Research Design Specialist	Advises a program evaluator on the most appropriate and efficient strategies for data collection and analysis.
Sampling Specialist	Advises program evaluator on sampling strategies to ensure maximum validity and reliability of information collected.
Survey Researcher	Advises on the construction of interviews and questionnaires. Assists in implementation of phone, mail, or in-person surveys of JTPA participants, employers and others. Trains and supervises interviewers.
Applied Social Statistician	Advises on appropriate and efficient methods for statistical analysis of data in order to obtain valid information.
Public Information Staffer	Assists in promotion of evaluation effort, developing informational materials and/or funding solicitations. Assists in packaging and dissemination of final reports.

At first glance, the above list of specialized staffing needs may seem formidable. However, the list is offered not to discourage, but to realistically present some of the distinct resources evaluation will have to draw on in order to provide truly useful information about JTPA. The experts listed in the second chart (Additional Evaluation Specialists) are necessary only if the evaluation questions to be answered present particular research challenges where the core staff must turn for special advice. Moreover, a small core research staff can encompass a number of these skills so that staffing costs need not be prohibitive. One state for example, accomplishes much of its ongoing JTPA evaluation work with one research director and two assistants.

WHO SHOULD STAFF AN EVALUATION?

Two major staffing configurations for carrying out evaluation are possible: in-house staffing and outside consultant staffing. Each has its decided pluses and minuses, which will be more or less pronouced depending on the particular evaluation context. The following discussion touches on the potential advantages and disadvantages of each staffing approach and offers some compromise strategies combining both. We begin with an examination of the in-house staffing approach.

The In-House Approach

Some states and SDAs are meeting the JTPA evaluation challenge through creative in-house approaches. While many SDAs or their CETA predecessors never have themselves conducted comprehensive evaluation of their employment and training programs, they often have access to untapped resources sufficient for such an undertaking. In larger SDAs, although requisite staff may be scattered throughout the JTPA or local government systems, these resources may be drawn together as a special evaluation team or loosely coordinated as an in-house consultant panel.

Certainly, cost is one of the most compelling arguments for seeking in-house expertise. However, in certain settings, such an approach may involve many hidden costs which need to be entered into the overall calculation in deciding which staffing strategy to pursue.

First, it may take significant time and effort to locate and engage special evaluation staff. Division or agency heads are likely to be skeptical and resistant to loaning personnel (underscoring what has been said earlier about the importance of building broad organizational support for evaluation). Also, pooling in-house staff resources may require extra management staff to bridge the communication and coordination gaps that inevitably will arise. And finally, there may be some inefficiencies associated with less experienced and less specialized staff attempting to progress along a learning curve while evaluating JTPA.

Cutting corners on evaluation specialists may ultimately cost the organization far more than would have originally been spent on consultant fees. Where in-house evaluation staff lack requisite technical expertise, the great risk is that the information obtained will lack sufficient reliability or validity; the findings will be of diminished value. A less obvious cost of using in-house evaluators may be lower credibility of the evaluation results.

However, the in-house approach to evaluation also carries some less obvious, but potentially important benefits, which include:

- Evaluation staff's familiarity with the organization setting, data collection systems, staff capabilities, time schedules, program procedures, etc.
- Fewer entry problems for evaluation staff, more rapport with program staff; greater receptivity to programmatic needs of staff.
- Cost savings potential through closer monitoring and control of the work in progress.
- Opportunities to foster inter- and intra-agency communication.
- Capacity-building for further evaluation efforts.
- Flexibility in reassigning evaluation staff to evolving tasks.

In-house staff may also provide continuity to the evaluation process. Staff are present at the beginning, so that evaluation needs are accomodated in program design and evaluation; staff are also present after the evaluation, to facilitate and encourage the programmatic changes identified as useful.

Building an In-House Evaluation Capability

In building a JTPA evaluation capability, SDAs have a number of options. Given the wide range of evaluation needs, in-house capabilities, and organizational constraints in each SDA, no one option can claim clear superiority. The staffing approach that is effective in one setting, may be ineffective in another. Of particular concern in assessing the appropriateness of a staffing strategy are the six criteria mentioned in the Chapter 4 discussion of where to locate an evaluation unit. Again, those criteria are:

- Position within the authority structure
- Separation from compliance functions
- Neutrality
- Trust
- Coordination capabilities
- General competency

When applied to different staffing approaches, these criteria suggest pluses and minuses and distinct tradeoffs between those approaches. Each SDA will have to judge for itself how it may best develop its evaluation capabilities, given the organizational framework within which its JTPA programs operate. For a specific checklist of concerns about who should do evaluation, see the following page.

The Outside Consultant Strategy

Within the evaluation community the debate over whether to use in-house resources has been ongoing. Obviously, in circumstances where access to in-house expertise is limited, turning to outside evaluation specialists is the only option.

However, critics of the in-house approach argue that even if in-house resources are available, some important potential benefits offered by outside consultants should not be overlooked. These potential benefits include:

WHO SHOULD DO THE EVALUATION?

AUTHORITY FACTORS	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1. Will evaluation staff be removed from the organizational hierarchy of programs being evaluated?	☐	☐	☐
2. Will evaluation staff report directly to key decision-makers?	☐	☐	☐
3. Will evaluation activities be separate from compliance activities?	☐	☐	☐
4. Will evaluation staff have sufficient status to obtain necessary cooperation with program staff?	☐	☐	☐
INDEPENDENCE AND NEUTRALITY FACTORS			
1. Will evaluators' organizational status permit their independent judgment and action where appropriate?	☐	☐	☐
2. Will those being evaluated receive evaluators as independent and neutral?	☐	☐	☐
3. Will funders or other decision-makers view evaluators as independent and credible researchers?	☐	☐	☐
TRUST FACTORS			
1. Will evaluation staff have requisite interpersonal skills?	☐	☐	☐
2. Will evaluation staff have good rapport with program staff and ready access to information?	☐	☐	☐
3. Will decision-makers be likely to trust the evaluation findings?	☐	☐	☐
COMPETENCY AND COORDINATION FACTORS			
1. Will evaluation staff have requisite skills/ expertise?	☐	☐	☐
2. Will evaluation staff include those with specific experience in evaluating employment and training programs?	☐	☐	☐
3. Will evaluation staff be familiar with the JTPA system?	☐	☐	☐
4. Will evaluation staff include those with good organizational, planning and management skills?	☐	☐	☐
5. Will evaluation staff be able to effectively use and develop communication and coordination channels among JTPA actors?	☐	☐	☐

- Greater credibility with evaluation users, particularly funders.
- Separation from the organization which allows for greater objectivity and fairness (actual or perceived).
- More acceptance from program staff who feel less threatened.
- Greater assurances of a quality product produced by an experienced specialist.
- Greater cost effectiveness in the long run.
- Ability to allow staffing levels to fluctuate in response to varying resource needs.

Outside evaluations may be most appropriate in situations where organizational tensions or mistrust call for an evaluation with maximum separation from the JTPA system. For example, outside consultants may provide greater credibility when the evaluation calls for a more subjective assessment of process or implementation factors. In such a case, service providers, SDA staff and other stakeholders may more easily trust and accept the interpretive evaluation results of an outsider.

Compromise Staffing Strategies

A compromise staffing strategy involves the judicious use of consultants at critical planning and implementation junctures of the evaluation where expertise is most needed. For example, a consultant might be brought in solely to assess the evaluability of a program (see Chapter 3) or to develop the evaluation design which others may carry out. Alternatively, a consultant's role might be strictly advisory, limited to reviewing and commenting on the in-house evaluation work in progress. In this manner, quality control might be assured, while consultants' fees are contained. When a formal review is conducted by a completely independent party, the process may be considered an evaluation audit, as described below.

Incorporating Audit Procedures into the Evaluation

An in-between staffing solution is to supplement in-house evaluation activities with external auditing of those activities. In essence, the audit constitutes an evaluation of the evaluation, a process sometimes referred to as "meta-evaluation."

This kind of audit by an independent third party serves several functions. An auditor can formally review and critique not only the evaluation plan, but also implementation procedures and the final evaluation report. By reviewing the plan before evaluation commences, the auditor can spot problems, gaps and weaknesses in the plan and suggest changes to improve the scientific soundness, the organizational effectiveness, or the efficiency of the evaluation. Using an outside auditor not only can improve the utility and appropriateness of the evaluation, but also can enhance the credibility of an effort planned and executed by in-house staff. Because using an auditor offers many of the protections of contracting out an evaluation but at a much reduced cost, it is an attractive staffing alternative.

Audit Criteria

If an auditor is to be used, his or her contract should specify, among other things, the timing and manner in which the audit will be carried out, the evaluation elements to be examined and how findings will be presented. (For more on selecting a consultant, see the last section of this chapter.) The specific criteria for evaluating an evaluation will obviously vary with the individual setting, but need not be confined only to considerations of research approach and methodology. The evaluation's soundness may also be judged in terms of its organizational appropriateness, utility, and cost-effectiveness. On the following page, a checklist of meta-evaluation criteria adapted from Stufflebeam (1974) illustrates the critical breadth an evaluation audit may entail.

FINDING CONSULTANTS: WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Choice of consultants is not limited to the few listings found in the Yellow Pages directory, or to RFP respondents. However, finding other consultant options will entail some initial effort in stepping outside familiar agency territory to ferret out new institutional contacts both in the public and private sector.

Finding a Consultant

While options for outside assistance will be different in each setting, the list below summarizes some of the basic kinds of external resources available to a local JTPA evaluation development effort.

CRITERIA FOR AUDITING AN EVALUATION

CRITERIA FOR TECHNICAL ADEQUACY

- Internal validity - whether the findings are accurate
- External validity - the extent to which the information is "generalizable" (i.e., the range of persons and conditions to which the findings can be applied)
- Reliability - whether the data are accurate
- Objectivity - whether the data are likely to be interpreted similarly by different competent judges

CRITERIA FOR UTILITY

- Relevance - whether the findings relate to the purposes of the program
- Importance - whether the evaluation covers the most essential features of the program
- Scope - whether the evaluation addresses all of the important questions
- Credibility - whether the audience trusts the evaluators and supposes them to be free of bias in conducting the evaluation
- Timeliness - whether the evaluation findings are available in time to be used in making decisions
- Pervasiveness - whether the findings are disseminated to all intended audiences

CRITERION FOR COST-EFFECTIVENESS

- Cost-effectiveness - whether the evaluation costs are kept as low as possible without sacrificing quality

From: Daniel L. Stufflebeam, "Meta-Evaluation." Occasional Paper No. 3, Kalamazoo, MI: Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University, 1974.

- Universities and Colleges: Both faculty and students may have specialized expertise they would like to lend to an applied evaluation research setting. While academic institutions rarely have a specialized degree program in evaluation, many departments, such as business administration, planning, public affairs, economics, sociology, political science, and social work will house individuals with an expertise in evaluation research. Not only faculty, but graduate students under faculty supervision might be able to offer valuable expertise. A possible constraint to using faculty and graduate students is the limited time they might have to devote to outside consulting and research. On the other hand, faculty are often better trained for specialized evaluation requirements and are often less costly as a staffing alternative.

- Research Institutes: Even if the research institute itself does not have appropriate specialists, institute personnel may be plugged into a broader network of researchers which include the right kinds of specialists for a particular JTPA evaluation effort.

- Professional Groups: Evaluation research encompasses a number of professional associations. Organizations such as the Evaluation Research Society (a national professional association for evaluators) or the American Sociological Association can be of use in locating qualified evaluators within a given area. Some states are also actively tapping such associations for assistance in doing JTPA evaluation planning; SDAs might also utilize such assistance.

- Local Government: City and county planning staff (non-JTPA) with experience in CETA and other training and development programs may also be able to consult or advise for a JTPA evaluation project. Alternatively, these groups may offer important perspectives on available private evaluation consultants.

- Business and Labor-Affiliated Organizations: Many such organizations are also keenly interested in JTPA and may have staff or other contacts interested in participating in an evaluation effort. The National Alliance for Business (NAB), for example, has been directly involved in the staffing of local JTPA evaluations. The labor-affiliated Human Resources Development Institute (HRDI) has also been active in JTPA planning and assessment issues, particularly in the Title III programs.

In exploring any of these options, the key is developing ongoing contacts within the network of researchers affiliated with these groups to maximize the chances of finding the right kind of consultants at the right price. Many times, consultant resources through these groups are available at a much reduced cost or additional organizational resources are at the consultants's command. (Refer to Chapter 9, "Funding a JTPA Evaluation," for more on utilizing outside resources to support evaluation.)

Selecting a Consultant

Consultants' fees vary tremendously and so do the quality and types of services offered. There is no fool-proof method for guaranteeing an appropriate and quality product from a hired consultant (although controlling the purse strings helps). However, some preliminary assessment (even though it may be irritatingly time-consuming) of the consultant and the consultant services offered will increase the chances of choosing wisely. Preliminary assessment might involve:

- **Reviewing consultant's resume and written products**
    - As a first requirement, does the consultant have the requisite specialized research skills and training necessary to carry out the particular activities needed?
    - Do the products have clarity and depth?
    - Are materials well-written, understandable?
    - Do products suggest the consultant has skills and experience applicable to the task at hand?
- **Interviewing the consultant**
    - What are the consultant's areas of expertise and training?
    - What are his or her conceptual or methodological biases?
    - Does his or her approach to evaluation fit with your particular program's needs?
    - How sensitive is the evaluator to organizational factors affecting evaluation?
    - How will the evaluator fit in? How well will he or she relate to others on the evaluation team or in the program? How independent will he or she be?
- **Contacting previous contractors**
    - How timely have previous efforts been?
    - What is the quality of previous work?
    - How well did the contractor work with others?

  - Were any problems or difficulties encountered?

- **Requesting a written plan of action** (Works best if evaluation priorities have already been established and the role of the evaluator within the overall framework of the evaluation is fairly well-defined.)

  - How well does the evaluator grasp his or her role?

  - How creatively does the evaluator deal with limitations and constraints?

  - What special resources can the evaluator marshal from outside? (e.g., access to computer use, word processing, other consultants.)

Contract Concerns

The final step in selecting a consultant is ironing out a contract that both parties will be satisfied with. A good contract anticipates areas of potential ambiguity or conflict and protects both the consultant and the contracting agency. Among other things, the contract should:

- Specify all interim and final products and a timetable for each product's completion. Requirements for interim products are especially important in a large or lengthy project to keep the project on track and to allow for review, comment and revision.

- Detail specific roles, responsibilities, lines of authority and decision-making procedures in the evaluation project.

- Define which resources (such as secretarial and other staff, computer time and copying machines) the evaluator will have access to, and in what ways such access will be delimited.

- Include any follow-up responsibilities the consultant might have once the evaluation is complete, such as making in-person presentations of the findings to specified groups.

- Determine what proprietary rights the consultant has in the evaluation findings or products.

- Determine what kind of confidentiality requirements the consultant must agree to observe.

- Make payment conditional on satisfactory interim and final products, specifying (as clearly as is possible) what constitutes "satisfactory" and through what process the acceptability of a product will be determined.

- Outline expectations and a timetable for revision work.

- Include a termination clause allowing either party to terminate the contract with proper advance written notice.

CONCLUSION

There is no magic formula for staffing an evaluation effort. In choosing a particular staffing configuration, so many factors enter in: the level of in-house talent and expertise, staff availability, comparative costs of different staff choices, credibility factors and other political considerations, to mention a few. As the last sections imply, finding and selecting a consultant to complement evaluation activities tacks on additional time costs in interviewing, assessing consultant products and past performance, and assembling and negotiating a contract. Given all these staffing considerations and concerns, each SDA must determine what evaluation staffing pattern is most efficient and feasible. Hopefully this chapter has offered some useful guidelines in making this determination.

VOLUME CONCLUSION

This guide has focused on various planning and implementation issues which will likely confront a local-level JTPA evaluation effort. A primary goal has been to help JTPA practitioners anticipate the kinds of planning and resource commitments an evaluation might entail. A theme which threads throughout the various planning steps described is the importance of the organizational context to the evaluation process. Initial planning effort must be devoted to assessing the organizational supports and constraints to evaluation and developing evaluation strategies which are responsive to this organizational framework. Various stakeholders within JTPA must be brought into the planning process early to nurture their involvement and commitment to the undertaking and to insure greater relevance and utility of the evaluation findings. In the planning stages, evaluation staff may play a key role in bringing together diverse actors within JTPA and creating new patterns of communication and cooperation.

While pointing out potential issues and problem areas, this guide's central message to JTPA practitioners is one of encouragement in the evaluation undertaking. Evaluation can make a difference to JTPA managers and policy-makers needing specialized information about how efficiently and effectively JTPA goals are being met. And evaluation can result in indirect organizational benefits, such as enhanced credibility, improved organizational structure, or more efficient and accurate data collection.

Before committing to evaluation, JTPA decision-makers not only want to be certain of its returns; they also need to know that the entity will have the capabilities for successfully carrying out the endeavor. For this reason, the guide has given added emphasis to specific implementation concerns. An underlying premise throughout is that local JTPA organizations, despite internal JTPA funding restriction, have a number of options open to them in organizing, staffing, and funding an evaluation. In exercising these options, JTPA staff may make valuable new connections with other governmental agencies, universities and colleges, and private sector organizations.

REFERENCES

SELECTED REFERENCES

ON PROGRAM EVALUATION

GENERAL PROGRAM EVALUATION

Alkin, Marvin C.; Daillak, Richard; and White, Peter. *Using Evaluations; Does Evaluation Make a Difference?* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1979.

Chelimsky, Eleanor, ed. *Program Evaluation: Patterns and Directions*. Washington, D.C.: The American Society for Public Administration, 1985.

Hatry, Harry, Winnie, Richard; and Fisk, Donald. *Practical Program Evaluation for State and Local Government Officials*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1973.

Kimmel, Wayne A. *Putting Program Evaluation in Perspective for State and Local Government*. Human Services Monograph No. 18. Rockville, MD: Project SHARE Corporation. April, 1981.

Rutman, Leonard. *Evaluation Research Methods: A Basic Guide*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publicataions, 1984.

Streuning, Elmer L., and Guttentag, Marcia, eds. *Handbook of Evaluation Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975.

Weiss, Carol H. *Evaluating Action Programs*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1972.

Weiss, Carol H. *Evaluation Research: Methods of Assessing Program Affectiveness*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

Wholey, Joseph S. *Evaluation: Promise and Performance*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1977.

EVALUATION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Adams, Kay A. and Walker, Jerry P. *Improving the Accountability of Career Education Programs: Evaluation Guidelines and Checklists*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Ohio State University, 1979.

Austin, Michael J. and Associates. *Evaluating Your Agency's Programs*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982.

Alkins, Marvin C. and Associates. *A Guide For Evaluation Decision Makers*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985.

Fink, Arlene and Kosecoff, Jaqueline. *Evaluation Basics: A Practitioner's Manual*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982.

Pitz, Gordon, and McKillip, Jack. *Decision Analysis for Program Evaluators*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 198_.

Rossi, Peter H., and Freeman, Howard E. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982.

Stufflebeam, Daniel L. "Meta Evaluation." *Occasional Paper No. 3*. Kalamazoo, MI: Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University, 1974.

EVALUABILITY AND EVALUATION UTILITY

Davis, Howard R. and Salasin, Susan E. "The Utilization of Evaluation." In *Handbook of Evaluation Research*. Elmer L. Struening and Marcia Guttentag, eds., Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975.

Patton, Michael Quinn. *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978.

Rutman, Leonard. *Planning Useful Evaluations*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980.

Schmidt, Richard E.; Scanlon, John; and Bell, James B. *Evaluability Assessment: Making Public Programs Work Better*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. 1978. Also in the Human Services Monograph Series, No. 14., Rockville, Md.: Project SHARE, November, 1979.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT OF EVALUATION

Bricknell, Henry M. *The Influence of External Political Factors on the Role and Methodology of Evaluation*. Portland, OR: Northwest Educational Laboratory, 1975.

Bardoll, Gerald L. "Type III Evaluation: Consultation and Consensus." *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 40, No. 2. March/April, 1980, pp. 174-179.

Polivka, Larry and Stryker, Laurey T. "Program Evaluation and the Policy Process in State Government: An Effective Linkage." *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 43, No. 3. May/June, 1983. pp. 255-259.

Rodman, Hyman and Kolodny, Ralph. "Organizational Strains in the Research-Practitioner Relationship." In *Readings in Evaluation Research*. Francis G. Caro, editor. New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation, 1977.

Weiss, Carol H., and Barton, Allen H. *Making Bureacracies Work*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980.

Wildavsky, Aaron. "The Self-Evaluating Organization." *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 32, No. 5. September/October, 1972, pp. 509-520.

EVALUATION COSTS

Alkin, Marvin C., and Solmon, Lewis C. *The Costs of Evaluation*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983.

FUND SEARCH RESOURCES

The Foundation Center publishes extensive materials on foundations and corporate donations activities (888 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10106). Some of the main reference publications are described briefly below:

The Foundation Directory
This lists over 2,500 foundations, providing a summary of each foundation's purposes, award amounds, officers, and application procedures. It is revised annually, and has mid-year supplements.

Foundation Grants Index
This lists over 10,000 grants awarded by American philanthropic foundations. It is updated periodically, not necesaarily annually.

Foundation Center Source Book Profiles
This covers only the largest foundations in the United States. It provides a comprehensive survey of information on these organizations, including grant awards and current programs. It is periodically updated.

National Data Book
This lists over 20,000 organizations which have been classified by the IRS as private foundations. Volume II is a state listing of foundations in rank order by descending assets.

Comsearch Printouts
These are computer printouts in approximately 66 subject areas, listing grants by more than 400 major foundations. The data base is the other Foundation Center books. These can alkso be obtained in microfiche.

Corporate Foundation Profiles
This is a comprehensive analysis of each of over 200 of the largest company-sponsored foundations.

Grant Writing Materials
In addition to the above directories, the Foundation Center also has numerous how-to materials on planning, preparing, and submitting grant proposals.

Other directories focusing on corporate donation activities include:

Corporate 500. San Francisco: Public Management Institue (Annual). This annual directory tracks corporate giving of the largest corporations. Quarterly updates are also available.

Taft Corporate Directory. Washington, D.C.: The Taft Corporation (monthly).

Corporate Giving. Washington, D.C.: The Taft Corporation (monthly).

Corporate Updates. Washington, D.C.: The Taft Corporation (monthly).

Appendix

A Report on a National/State Survey of Local JTPA Constituencies

By Bonnie Snedeker

Snedeker Scientific, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

METHODOLOGY 5

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL CLIMATE FOR EVALUATION 9

LOCAL USES OF EVALUATION INFORMATION 13

PRIORITIES FOR OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT 20

PRIORITIES FOR EVALUATION DESIGN PACKAGES 23

SUGGESTIONS FOR EVALUATION DESIGNERS 27

LOCAL CAPABILITIES AND CONTINGENCIES 30

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of a telephone survey on the JTPA evaluation priorities and capabilities of local-level constituencies. The survey was conducted by Snedeker Scientific, Inc. and the Seattle-King County Private Industry Council during February through April, 1985. Included in the survey were SDA, PIC, and local government representatives from 24 SDAs - 12 in Washington State and 12 from a specially selected national sample.

The survey is part of the JTPA Evaluation Design Project, conducted by the Washington State Employment Security Department, with support from the National Commission on Employment Policy and the I.B.M. Corporation. This project, through the combined efforts of a team of evaluation design specialists and a national advisory committee of state and local practitioners, will develop and produce a series of evaluation models which can be used to assess the effectiveness and impact of JTPA programs and systems at the state and SDA levels.

The purpose of the survey is to provide input from local constituencies which can help the evaluation designers to develop models appropriate for JTPA evaluation at the local as well as the state level. Specifically, the survey sought useable information in the following areas: 1) the climate for evaluation initiatives at the SDA level; 2) local priorities and needs for the use of evaluation information; 3) local issues and priorities in regard to specific evaluation measures and design capabilities; 4) local suggestions for evaluation designers; and 5) local system capabilities and contingencies.

The survey was designed to produce maximum input from local constituencies within some fairly tight resource and time constraints. We make no claims of statistical significance for its findings. It is best viewed as a practical research effort, intended to tap local constituencies on a selective basis and produce descriptive and qualitative information of particular interest and utility for evaluation designers. It is hoped that these findings will be of interest also to those who participated in the survey, as well as others concerned with JTPA evaluation at the SDA level.

The report is organized into seven major sections. The first section provides an overview of the methodology employed in designing and conducting the survey and analyzing survey responses.

The second section summarizes our analysis of the local climate for JTPA evaluation and the potential receptivity of local constituencies for evaluation models and guides.

The third section of the report focuses on how evaluation information is used, or could potentially be be most useful, at the SDA level. It describes in some detail local uses and needs for evaluation information in five priority areas: 1) performance management; 2) local policy development; 3) program funding, design and development; 4) publicly documenting accomplishments; and 5) marketing.

Section four lists and summarizes local constituency priorities for various measures of longer-term outcomes and effectiveness.

Section five lists and comments on the evaluation capabilities rated by local constituencies as priority elements for inclusion in an overall evaluation design package.

The sixth section summarizes respondents' suggestions for consideration that evaluation designers should bear in mind in developing and producing JTPA evaluation models and guides for use at the SDA level.

The final section of the report examines current local system capabilities and potential constraints in four areas: 1) data collection, retrieval, and analysis; 2) funding support; 3) staffing support; and 4) PIC support.

METHODOLOGY

The survey approach was designed by Bonnie Snedeker (Snedeker Scientific Inc.) and Brian O' Sullivan (Seattle-King County PIC) under the direction of the Project Coordinator, Ann Blalock (Washington State Employment Security Department.)

It was determined at the outset that, given the time and financial resources available, the best approach for tapping useful input from local constituencies would be a telephone survey of a limited but carefully selected sample of SDAs. Upon further consideration it was determined that two groups of SDAs would be surveyed: 1) a national sample of 12 SDAs, representing a structured mix of key SDA types; and 2) 100 percent of the (12) SDAs in Washington State.

The 12 SDAs in the national sample were selected through a process of consultation with national advisory committee members, state JTPA officials, National Alliance of Business researchers, and a network of other national, regional, and local contacts. The national sample was structured to include a mix of key SDA types in regard to the following variables: 1) geographic region of the U.S.; 2) magnitude of JTPA funding (size of SDA II-A grant); 3) population density (urban, suburban, rural); 4) jurisdictional configuration (city, county, multi-county, etc.); and 5) apparent involvement to date in local-level evaluation initiatives.

A descriptive breakdown of the national sample by four primary criteria is provided below

1) Size of II-A Grant (PY 1984)	
Over $6 million	2 SDAs
$2-$6 million	3 SDAs
Under $2 million	7 SDAs

2) Population Density	
predominantly Urban/metro	4 SDAs
predominantly Suburban	2 SDAs
predominantly Rural	3 SDAs
Mixed	3 SDAs

3) Jurisdictional Configuration

City Only	1 SDA
City/County	3 SDAs
County or Balance of County	2 SDAs
Multi-County	5 SDAs
Collection of Townships	1 SDA

4) Sophistication: Indication of Substantial Involvement in Local Evaluation Initiatives

Yes	6 SDAs
No	6 SDAs

The National sample includes the following SDAs:

1. Metro-Southwest SDA, Massachusetts)Region I)

2. Cumberland County SDA, Maine (Region II)

3. Balance of Onondaga County SDA, New York (Region II)

4. Baltimore County SDA, Maryland (Region III)

5. South Florida Employment and Training Consortium (Region IV)

6. Gulf Coast Business Services Corporation, Mississippi (Region IV)

7. Lansing Tri-County Consortium, Michigan (Region V)

8. City of St. Paul, Minnesota (Region V)

9. Balance of Captital Planning Region, Texas (Region VI)

10. SDA V, Iowa (Region VII)

11. Denver Employment and Training Consortium, Colorado (Region VIII)

12. San Diego Regional Employment and Training Consortium, California (Region IX)

The 12 Washington SDAs, which were included in the survey, range from a large metropolitan system with a II-A grant of nearly $8 million to a rural eight-county SDA with a II-A grant of less than $1 million. In comparison with the national sample, Washington SDAs were somewhat less likely to have conducted substantial local evaluation initiatives (only 4 of the 12 were assessed as having substantial experience in this area.) There were also more multi-county SDAs in the Washington sample (8 of 12), fewer predominantly urban or metropolitan SDAs (3 of 12), and more SDAs with a predominantly rural or mixed urban/rural population (8 of 12).

The Washington SDAs surveyed include:

SDA I. Olympic Consortium

SDA II. Pacific Mountain Consortium

SDA III. Northwest Washington

SDA IV. Snohomish County

SDA V. Seattle-King County

SDA VI. Tacoma-Pierce County

SDA VII. Southwest Washington Consortium

SDA VIII. Pentad Consortium

SDA IX. Tri-Valley Consortium

SDA X. Eastern Job Training Partnership

SDA XI. Benton, Frankin, Walla Walla Counties

SDA XII. Spokane City and County Consortium

It was the goal of this survey to tap input from a variety of local constituencies, including: SDA-level administrative staff; PIC members; and local elected officials. From past experience with research at the SDA level, it was anticipated that the greatest amount of useable information would be derived from interviews with SDA administrative entity staff. It was, therefore, determined that SDA directors and/or designated staff would be the primary information source for the survey.

The survey approach included initial contact with the administrative director in each SDA. This was followed by a scheduled telephone interview with the director or staff person designated as being most knowledgeable about SDA-level evaluation issues. In conducting SDA respondent interviews, we used structured interview guides and reporting formats, which included a combination of open-ended, limited choice, and scaled rating response items. SDA respondent interviews lasted between 40-90 minutes, depending upon the time availability and interest of the respondent and the extensiveness of the evaluation issues and activities currently on the SDA agenda.

We asked SDA directors to recommend PIC members and local elected officials with an interest or involvement in JTPA evaluation. All SDA respondents provided contact information for at least one PIC or local government representative. A shorter interview guide and reporting format, which duplicated some of the items on the SDA instrument, was used in conducting the PIC/LEO interviews. These interviews typically were accomplished within 30 minutes. The general level of awareness and ability to address specific evaluation issues was, understandably, lower among the PIC/LEO respondents.

Interview reporting formats were completed for a total of 49 individuals, including: 12 Washington SDA respondents; 12 SDA respondents from the national sample; 15 PIC members; and 10 local elected officials.

Recorded responses were analyzed, by subject area and on an item-by-item basis, for each of the major categories of respondents and across all respondents. Open-ended responses were analyzed and grouped by frequency; multiple-choice responses were tabulated; and mean ratings were calculated for scaled rating items.

In capturing, analyzing, and reporting telephone survey information, researcher accuracy, understanding, and interpretation are obviously open to question. While recognizing our own limitations, we take full responsibility for the material contained in this report.

OVERVIEW OF THE LOCAL CLIMATE FOR EVALUATION

It is the goal of this project to produce evaluation design materials that will stimulate, guide, and support JTPA evaluation efforts - at the local SDA level, as well as at the state level.

Receptivity for the products this project is developing cannot be taken for granted. Some of the factors that will determine whether our products are used at the SDA level are:

1) The extent to which local constituencies are interested in evaluation issues and willing to pursue evaluation initiatives;

2) The extent to which local systems are capable of supporting evaluation initiatives;

3) The extent to which there are felt needs for outside assistance in conceptualizing, designing and structuring local evaluation initiatives;

4) The extent to which the products we develop fit - or can be fitted to - the particular priorities, needs and capabilities of local constituencies.

This survey found considerable interest in evaluation issues among local constituencies. It also found considerable variation in how these issues have been conceptualized and acted upon to date at the SDA level.

One trend was strong across the survey sample. Local accountability for performance is a key feature of the JTPA environment. Virtually all of the respondents reported that tracking and monitoring program performance is a high priority for their SDA. At a base level, all local constituencies expressed a concern for achieving and documenting job placements (and other positive outcomes) for participants at a reasonable cost, and all of the SDAs have some system for basic performance tracking.

In most SDAs, concern for evaluation extends beyond performance tracking and documentation. The local constituencies we surveyed are interested in capturing feedback -- both quantitative and qualitative - on program performance and effects; analyzing this feedback, extracting useful findings, and applying them in a variety of contexts.

This analysis, and utilization of program information is conducted by SDAs at varying levels of formality, sophistication, and consistency. Such activity is often geared toward immediate funding or design decisions or ongoing management efforts which may draw on other types of information, such as labor market and demographic data, national R & D findings, as well as locally generated feedback on program operations and outcomes. SDAs are more likely to classify these activities as analysis, assessment, or even planning, than as "evaluation".

For many local-level actors, the term evaluation connotes a formal study or structured review of the system at large or of specific programs or components, conducted at a specific point in time, by persons outside of the ongoing management and planning efforts. This type of evaluation, while viewed as worthwhile and potentially useful, has been less frequently employed among the SDAs surveyed.

Definitional and conceptual confusion made it somewhat difficult to gauge quickly the extent to which each SDA has actually engaged in local evaluation initiatives to date. Upon initial inquiry, one-half of the national sample and nearly two-thirds of the Washington SDAs reported that they had not yet conducted substantial evaluations under JTPA. On further inquiry, it became apparent, however, that virtually all of the SDAs were capturing, analyzing, and using certain types of performance data on, at least, an ad hoc basis. The other SDAs - half of the national sample and one-third of the Washington systems - were able to describe specific evaluation activities which had been locally designed and initiated.

Much of the more developed evaluation activity we encountered was found among the larger SDAs in the sample. When it comes to local capabilities for supporting evaluation initiatives, larger SDAs have some distinct advantages. These include: greater financial resources and more flexibility in administrative budgeting; more staff, including staff with needed technical expertise; a larger data base; and, in some cases, more sophisticated data retrieval and analysis capabilities. However, we also encountered a number of smaller SDAs, including some with II-A allocations of under $1 million, which had found creative ways to carry out locally tailored evaluation initiatives.

Even with current limitations on resources and less than optimal capabilities, the majority of SDA systems have the basic capabilities, interest, and desire to do more in the area of evaluation. Over 80 percent of the SDAs surveyed have automated data storage and retrieval systems which are capable of, or can be adapted to support increased evaluation efforts. Over 70 percent have some kind of system in place for capturing follow-up information on post-program (13 weeks or longer) outcomes. and 75 percent indicated specific plans to upgrade or expand their evaluation efforts during the coming year.

Major areas of development in local-level evaluation include:

1) Instituting longer-term follow-up and/or expanding or enriching follow-up contacts with employers or participants;

2) Conducting more systematic and detailed analyses and making greater use of program and follow-up data;

3) Upgrading the MIS or implementing a new information system;

4) Conducting process evaluations or special assessment studies;

5) Creating new linkages for accessing and using non-JTPA data bases (welfare/U.I.)

Finally, our survey found that local constituencies do recognize a need for outside assistance and guidance on evaluation designs and techniques. This need was expressed particularly by smaller systems which lack the expertise or resources to develop tailor made approaches from the ground-up. Nearly 30 percent of the SDAs surveyed had solicited some outside assistance in designing or conducting evaluations. Even more sophisticated, larger systems which are confident of their own technical expertise expressed a desire for high quality "off-the-shelf" designs and technical assistance guides which could be adapted to local purposes.

This does not mean, however that local constituencies are likely to jump into implementing any model that might be offered. The bottomline criteria for acceptable designs are simplicity, practicality, and reasonable prospects of producing outputs tailored to local-level uses. SDAs already feel burdened by state-imposed reporting and follow-up systems which are not geared to readily produce the types of information that would be most useful for local purposes.

Local-level needs for evaluation information and analyses are different from national or state-level needs, because local constituencies are directly involved in managing and awarding contracts, developing policy frameworks, allocating resources, and designing and delivering services.

The next section of this report looks at local priorities and needs in regard to specific uses of evaluation information.

LOCAL USE OF EVALUATION INFORMATION

1) Performance Management and Corrective Action

Survey responses indicate that the most common use to date of program performance data generated at the local level has been in the ongoing management of program operations and contracts, the identification of problems, and the initiation of corrective action efforts. Identifying performance problems and taking prompt action to correct them was cited as the most important current use of evaluation information by SDA directors and staff. (PIC members and LEO respondents tended to rate this use as slightly less important.)

The thrust of ongoing management efforts at the SDA level tends to be double-pronged: 1) to ensure that actual levels of participant and financial transactions are synchronized with levels specified in the job training plan and individual contracts; and 2) to ensure that the system as a whole will meet or exceed its annual performance standards.

Most SDAs prepare monthly managerial reports which analyze, at minimum, actual expenditures, enrollments, participant characteristics, and termination outcomes in comparison with planned levels - for the program overall and for each major training component and/or contractor. Performance data is summarized in quarterly reports which measure system-wide performance with regard to each of the basic performance standard indicators.

In the review of program performance data for ongoing systems management, particular attention is paid to the number and rate of terminees entering employment. Placement performance is fairly easy to track and analyze at any point in time on a contractor or component basis. Managerial action is taken promptly when placements are lagging seriously behind planned levels.

Controlling costs is another key management concern. Computing and tracking cost per entered employment (or cost per positive termination for youth) on an ongoing basis presents some difficulties for most SDAs. Financial data is not integrated with participant-based (MIS) data in the large majority of SDA systems. Cost data sometimes lags far behind information on participant transactions. Some SDAs only compute unit cost measures on a quarterly or year-end basis. Unit costs are often controlled through ceilings written into cost reimbursable contracts or (more effectively) through the provisions of unit price contracts, which pay a fixed amount per placement. Larger SDAs with fixed unit price contracting systems generally maintain separate cost accounting/verification systems to track on a weekly basis contractor payments linked with specific participant transactions. It is the exceptional SDA (only 2 of the 24 surveyed) that has a fully integrated financial and participant-based information system.

Computing actual versus planned performance statistics for basic indicators is less difficult for many SDAs than analyzing on an ongoing basis how actual performance stacks up against state-applied performance standards. State use of the regression model in adjusting performance standards for each SDA means that performance standards may be considerably altered by unanticipated changes in the program. For example, a shift in the demographic composition of enrollees or in the average duration of enrollment will alter the cost per entered employment standard against which the SDA will be evaluated by the state. In order to calculate how actual performance compares with the performance standard at a given point in time, an SDA must be able to accurately compute both actual unit costs and the adjusted performance standard. Many SDAs lack this capability at the current time. They concentrate, instead, on managing performance to correspond as closely as possible with the plan and wait until the end of the year to see how they will "come out" in regard to the cost per entered employment and cost per positive youth termination performance standards.

Another important focus of program management is monitoring performance in regard to key target groups. In some SDAs, concern is limited to groups for which specific enrollment levels have been mandated by the state (such as dropouts or WIN registrants.) But at least half of the SDAs surveyed have placed a high priority on achieving at least specific enrollment levels for other "most in need" target groups (such as minorities, single parents, and persons with handicaps.) With the exception of welfare recipients (for whom the entered employment rate is a mandated performance standard), management analysis of target group performance is typically limited to enrollment, as opposed to termination, analysis. About half of the SDAs reported that corrective action procedures are initiated when program contractors fail to meet target group enrollment objectives.

Other key performance indicators in program management are the average wage at placement and the percentage of placements that are training related. At least one-third of the SDAs surveyed have set specific objectives in one or both of these areas for major program components or individual training projects. These objectives are based in part on a detailed analysis of actual placement data.

Job retention is an increasing concern in performance management at the SDA-level. Most of the SDA systems included in the survey track 30 day retention data, and at least one-quarter of the SDAs pay explicit attention to this indicator in ongoing program management. Only a very few SDAs, however, incorporate longer-term follow-up data in managerial performance reviews.

2) Input for Local Policy Development

Survey responses indicate that the usefulness of evaluation information in orienting, educating, and informing local policymakers has been second in importance only to its usefulness in ongoing systems management. As a group, PIC members tended to consider this use of evaluation information to be the most important use to date at the SDA-level. In most SDAs, the PIC bears the primary responsibility for establishing local policy goals and program objectives.

The establishment of a meaningful SDA policy framework requires a good understanding of the local program environment. At a minimum, PIC policymakers have been required to understand the national performance standard indicators and determine the extent to which JTPA programs in the SDA will be required to meet specific performance goals. An analysis of first year performance results has provided baseline information for setting specific program objectives for subsequent years in most of the SDAs surveyed.

In some SDAs - perhaps half of those surveyed - local policy development is limited to the goal of exceeding all state-levied performance standards, thereby demonstrating superior performance in comparison with other SDAs in the state.

While SDAs with more developed policy frameworks also take national/state performance standards into account, their policy goals tend to reflect local circumstances and preferences. Several of the SDAs surveyed have made explicit policy choices to place greater priority on providing high quality training in specific occupational areas or on serving specified "most in need" segments of the eligible population than on achieving the cost per entered employment standard specified by the state. Some PICs are setting stringent objectives for target group enrollment, training-related placement rates, retention rates, average wage at placement, or ceilings on the proportion of direct placements which will be allowed These objectives are designed to reinforce local policy orientations.

The base of information and understanding required to support the development of a local policy framework goes beyond exposure to statistical summaries of enrollments, costs, and termination outcomes. Analysis of information not specifically generated through program activity (such as demographic and labor market data or national R&D findings) clearly plays a role in framing a local policy orientation. But perhaps more important is a substantive assessment of local program design and effectiveness with regard to key target populations and targeted occupations or sectors of the labor market. PIC members and SDA staff report that process evaluations, case studies, and other assessment efforts that provide descriptive and qualitative feedback as well as quantitative analysis have been extremely valuable in giving policymakers a clear picture of who the programs are serving, what they are actually doing, and what outcomes and impacts they can be expected to achieve.

3) Program Funding and Design

Local constituencies make decisions on how SDA resources will be allocated or deployed and on what programs, services, or contractors will be funded. In some cases SDA-level roles in program design and development are limited to setting performance goals, allocating funds, selecting contractors, and negotiating contracts. But in most cases PICs and SDA staff have a more extensive role in shaping program design. As shown by a recent survey conducted by the National Alliance of Business, administrative entities are directly involved in program operations in over half of all SDAs.

It is in the areas of program funding, design, and development that evaluation information is viewed by local constituencies as having its greatest potential usefulness.

A number of the SDAs we surveyed are using locally generated performance data as a basis for allocating training dollars across functional service areas. Several are using linear projection models, which use past performance data as a basis for predicting the performance outcomes (enrollments, placements, unit costs, etc.) which can be expected from different dollar allocations to functional service categories (OJT, institutional skills training, job club/placement services, etc.) The SDA selects and uses the allocation formula most likely to maximize performance results. While more sophisticated allocation models may include factors such as service to key target populations, wage rates, and training-related outcomes in their performance projections, none to date have included longer-term employment or earning gains for participants or reductions in welfare payments.

One of the simplest and most prevalent uses of evaluation information has been in making annual funding decisions with regard to specific contractors or projects. PIC committees analyze and compare past performance results in considering contract renewals and funding levels. Given the grant reductions being experienced by most SDAs, funding decisions often revolve around how necessary cutbacks will be distributed across current contractors or projects. Those training projects or program operators who do not compare favorably with their competitors in regard to job placement/positive termination or unit cost performance are the most likely to have their funding cut back or eliminated. Here again, while factors such as ability to serve high priority target populations or to provide priority services not otherwise available are generally considered in such funding decisions, information on probable longer-term impact and effectiveness is typically not available to decision-makers.

SDA staff and PICs become more substantially involved in program design through such activities as: the development of RFP criteria, programmatic specifications, contract provisions, and youth employment competency standards; the selection of occupational areas for institutional skills training; the development of training projects and curriculum.

In these endeavors, local constituencies are most apt to be concerned with determining the types and levels of skills, knowledge, and behavioral traits associated with securing and maintaining employment (often in a specific sector of the job market) and with identifying the best training approaches and techniques for assisting various types of JTPA-eligibles to secure needed competencies and make a successful labor market adjustment. SDAs are also interested in identifying those industries, occupations, or types of employers in the local market which offer the best prospects for employing JTPA trainees in jobs with reasonable entry-level wages and opportunities for stability and advancement.

Many of the people who participated in our survey expressed the desire for local evaluation information that would help in determining which training approaches and services are most likely to be effective in achieving longer-term benefits for participants. At minimum, local constituencies would like to be able to assess whether substantial investments in occupational skills training, or other more intensive developmental strategies result in benefits for participants and the community which are appreciably greater than those derived from less costly, shorter-term training and placement services.

4) Publicly Documenting Accomplishments

While most of the survey respondents placed importance on the use of local evaluation information to publicly document the accomplishments of the JTPA system, local elected officials were the only group to give this utilization area priority over policy development and program funding and design.

The large majority of respondents hold the belief that documentation and dissemination of positive evaluation results are important to the survival and funding of JTPA at the federal level. But they are not certain how local evaluation initiatives can effectively contribute to this effort. Solid justification of JTPA as an investment strategy requires some type of net impact analysis, which all of the constituencies surveyed felt was beyond the capabilities of local systems.

Nonetheless, most of the respondents felt it was important to establish a positive image within the community - both in terms of establishing public support for JTPA as a worthwhile program and in terms of building a reputation for the Private Industry Council as an effective organization.

While a number of respondents said that they try to get as much public relations mileage as possible out of favorable program assessments or performance results, comparatively few felt that their SDA had been very effective to date in drawing public attention to JTPA accomplishments. In comparison with other programs, such as public education and CETA at its height, JTPA has a small resource base and typically affects only a very limited segment of the community. There does not appear to be much community interest in JTPA in general, and there is even less interest or understanding for the types of findings typically generated by local assessment efforts. Descriptive reports of successful economic development linkages or special projects with a strong human interest factor are more apt to generate media attention.

5) Marketing

Survey respondents - particularly PIC members as a group and SDA administrators from Washington State - placed a relatively high priority on demonstrating the utility and benefits of JTPA programs to local employers. But few SDAs to date had managed to effectively develop or package evaluation information for use in marketing the program to employers.

PICs and SDA administrative entities have an expressed interest in generating broader private sector support for employment and training efforts targeted on JTPA-eligibles. But SDA-level marketing campaigns and materials have tended to use only generalized messages in alerting employers about the potential benefits of JTPA involvement. This is particularly true for SDAs which contract out all service delivery functions and have little or no contact with the employers who actually train and employ JTPA participants.

However, a significant portion of SDA administrative entities (over 40 percent according to the NAB survey) are directly involved in the delivery of JTPA placement services. Our survey responses indicate that SDAs with this kind of service delivery role are more likely to carefully analyze placement data and use their findings as a basis for targeting training, job development, and placement efforts.

Survey respondents also indicate a growing trend toward SDA-initiated contacts with employers as a means of generating useful feedback on employer satisfaction and program effectiveness. Such contact mechanisms could be used to generate evaluation information tailored for future marketing efforts.

PRIORITIES FOR OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS

Survey responses show that in analyzing evaluative information for program planning, management, and funding, SDAs to date have relied heavily on a fairly limited array of short-term indicators. However, the survey found a growing interest at the SDA level in measuring and analyzing longer-term outcomes of various types. A number of the SDAs are already investing considerable resources in capturing follow-up data.

We asked SDA respondents to rate the level of importance for their SDA/PIC of information on a variety of possible outcomes measures. Respondents rated each measure proposed on a scale of 1-5 (with 1=of no importance and 5=extremely important.) We compiled mean ratings on each measure for both the national sample, the Washington SDAs, and for the combined sample. Priority measures are listed below (with comments) in order of their composite mean rating.

1) Job Stability - Retention of Employment with the Placement Employer(Mean Rating = 4.1)

This outcome measure received the highest overall mean rating, but it was rated somewhat higher by Washington SDA respondents than by those in the national sample. Most SDAs view job retention as an interim rather than a final indicator of program outcomes. (Terminees are not expected to remain employees of the placement employers on a lifetime basis.) But retention data at 13 weeks is becoming more readily available and is viewed as a highly useful indicator of training quality and program effectiveness

2) Differentials in Results/Outcomes by Service Strategy or Project(Mean Rating = 3.9)

SDA respondents from the national sample were more likely than Washington respondents to place a high degree of importance on ability at the SDA level to measure differentials in outcomes or results across service strategies and projects. Most likely this is because of the greater number of smaller systems within Washington State which fund fewer individual projects, serve fewer participants, and tend to make less distinction among service strategies in program funding and assessment. A number of SDA respondents stressed the opinion that measures of differentials in outcomes or results by service strategy/project must take into account differentials in the types and characteristics of participants served.

3) Participant Earning Gains or Losses(3.8)

Few of the SDAs surveyed are currently able to estimate the extent to which participants experience an increase in annual earnings after program termination (as compared to pre-program experience.) None of the SDA respondents was interested in conducting net-impact evaluation at the local level, but most would like to have better information on participants' post-program earnings. In wage reporting states, U.I. data was viewed as the best potential source of post-program earnings data. Follow-up contact with participants was not generally viewed as a very accurate source of information on annual earnings. Annual earnings gains were viewed as a more meaningful measure than comparisons of pre/post hourly wages. But a number of respondents were interested in the extent to which participnat wage levels change during the post-placement year.

4) Training Relatedness of Employment Outcomes(3.7)

This measure received a higher mean ranking from the national sample SDAs than it did from Washington respondents. The extent to which post-program jobs are related to the type of training provided is of greater concern in SDAs which devote a substantial portion of their JTPA dollars to occupational skills training projects. These SDAs are interested in whether participants remain employed in training-related occupations and how they fare in targeted occupational areas after initial placement.

5) Reductions in Welfare Payments(3.5)

Only two of the SDAs surveyed reported that they were currently estimating or measuring reductions in welfare payments. Most were only calculating welfare entered employment rates. The ability to accurately calculate reductions in welfare payments depends upon access to welfare data, and many respondents had become discouraged in their attempts to gain such access. Some expressed a doubt that such access would ever be achieved at the local level and faulted the state for failure to secure cooperation from the welfare department. But most respondents felt that information on welfare payment reductions could be very useful - both in targeting program services and in demonstrating positive returns on the JTPA investment.

PRIORITIES FOR EVALUATION DESIGN PACKAGES

In an attempt to focus input from local constituencies more specifically on potential evaluational models, we asked survey respondents to rate the level of usefulness or importance to their SDA of various elements that might be included in a total evaluation package.

Their ratings (on a 1-5 scale) for each potential element were averaged, overall and for each of the following groups: 1) national sample SDA respondents; 2) Washington State SDA respondents; 3) PIC members; and 4) local elected officials. Responses are summarized below, in the order of priority indicated by overall mean ratings.

1) Strategies for evaluating program effectiveness in achieving longer-term employment and earnings gains for participants (Mean Rating = 4.4)

The need for evaluation designs which offer a practicable approach for SDA-level evaluation of program effectiveness in achieving longer-term employment and earnings gains for participants was rated most important by both national and Washington SDA respondents. PIC members gave this element a mean rating of 5 (on a 1-5 scale.) (The mean rating given by local elected officials was only 3.7.)

The interest of SDAs in gaining insights on longer-term program effectiveness is evidenced by the number of survey sites (almost half) which reported involvement in new follow-up activities and plans. But the majority of SDAs seem uncertain how best to structure such efforts and use the information they yield.

2) Strategies for Identifying Causes of Poor Performance (4.3)

All local constituencies tend to place some premium on evaluation approaches which offer the potential for identifying and predicting factors associated with poor performance. Only local elected officials, however, gave this evaluation element a top mean rating (5). Current SDA systems are typically geared to pick up indications of possible poor performance results fairly early in the program year. But administrative staff often have a difficult time determining the actual causes or conditions responsible for poor performance showings and ameliorating these conditions. Staff have even less ability to predict in advance which organizational or programmatic variables are most crucially linked with performance results.

3) Strategies for evaluating program effectiveness and benefits from an employer perspective (4.2)

This evaluation element tended to be rated somewhat higher in importance by local elected officials and PIC members than by SDA respondents. SDA respondents do place a relatively high priority on evaluation information that could be used for employer marketing. But some respondents believe that attempts to evaluate program impact on employing firms would be impractical and would prove less useful than qualitative feedback on employer satisfaction. SDAs could use assistance in techniques for tapping and analyzing employer feedback and using this information in marketing.

4) Techniques for analyzing the relationship between program strategies and performance results (4)

No SDA can afford to ignore performance standards and no SDA director wants to be stuck with planned performance objectives which can't possibly be met through the mix of program strategies or services that have been funded. SDA respondents place a high premium on evaluation designs which offer mechanisms (such as linear projection models) for predicting the affect that service mix, targeting strategy, and other program design decisions are likely to have on performance results. These kinds of approaches, while not seen as infallible, are viewed as giving administrative entities greater control over performance outcomes.

5) Practicable approaches for evaluating the benefits of JTPA for the community (3,9)

All of the groups surveyed tended to rate the ability to evaluate and demonstrate the benefits of JTPA for the community as being an, at least, moderately important element in an overall SDA evaluation design. Mean ratings for this evaluation element were highest for PIC members and lowest for Washington SDA respondents.

No one we surveyed felt that a net impact evaluation model was practicable at the SDA level. (One SDA, however, was establishing the kind of linkages to automated U.I. and welfare data bases which would make some form of net impact assessment feasible.) But respondents did feel it was important to demonstrate JTPA's effectiveness as an investment strategy and its beneficial effects for the community at large.

6) Approaches that allow for assessment of the effectiveness of a specific program strategy or component (3.8)

Respondents felt that an overall evaluation design package tailored to SDA-level use should include approaches for the intensive assessment of a specific strategy, component, or project. SDAs tend to focus evaluations geared toward program upgrading or redesign on only specific elements of the system; rarely is the total system up for grabs at any given moment in time. Process evaluation models which combine qualitative and quantitative techniques are viewed as being appropriate for intensive single-component assessments at the SDA level.

7) Techniques for comparing program strategies and results across contractors (3.4)

In a climate that places a high premium on performance but offers a declining base of resources for funding program services, valid techniques for rating contractor effectiveness are increasingly important at the SDA level. Larger systems with a number of competitive contractors tend to operate in a political environment which focuses considerable scrutiny on funding decisions. Most respondents realized that comparison of performance across contractors should take into account the characteristics of those being served and the types of services being provided.

8) Techniques for evaluating local processes - such as planning, managing and contracting approaches - and assessing the affects of these processes on program design and quality (3.3)

Among the groups surveyed, local elected officials and Washington SDA respondents were more apt to place a relatively high degree of importance on this element of local-level evaluation. Several SDAs in the national sample reported that they had conducted limited evaluations of specific local processes which had produced useful information. But other SDA respondents felt that self-evaluation of this type was apt to be less than objective, and most preferred to focus their limited evaluation capabilities on training strategies and program outcomes.

9) Approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of coordination linkages with non-JTPA programs (2.9)

Among all the groups surveyed, only local elected officials and PIC members rated the assessment of coordination linkages as a relatively important element in an SDA-level evaluation design package. Most SDA respondents had a hard time envisioning practical evaluation approaches which might yield useful insights on the effectiveness of coordination efforts. And a number of respondents indicated that meaningful coordination with non-JTPA programs was more dependent upon action taken at the state level rather than the local level.

10) Ability to analyze SDA effectiveness in comparison with other SDA systems

We did not explicitly ask for a rating on this potential feature of an overall evaluation design package. But many respondents mentioned that they would welcome the adoption of models which allow some ability to compare their effectiveness in various areas with that of other SDAs. Several respondents mentioned that the validity of such comparisons would depend upon a uniform base of definitions for key reporting categories, such as "enrollment" and "placement".

SUGGESTIONS FOR EVALUATION MODEL DESIGNERS

We asked survey respondents to tell us (on an open-ended basis) what they felt were the most important considerations evaluation designers should bear in mind in developing models or guides which would be useful at the SDA level. Their responses were recorded, grouped, and analyzed. A summary of suggestions from local constituencies is offered below.

1) Focus on specific purposes or uses

Local constituencies are not likely to adopt evaluation models proposed by outside designers without a clear sense of how the outputs of suggested evaluation designs can be used at the local level. A number of respondents suggested that evaluation guides begin with specific purposes or local utilization uses (such as better targeting of program services); indicate the kinds of evaluation information needed to effectively address these purposes; and then go on to suggest appropriate methodologies for securing and analyzing evaluation information.

Evaluation models which are capable of generating findings useful for a variety of different purposes will clearly be preferred. Specifically, local constituencies will want to know how proposed evaluation models will be of potential assistance to them in the following areas: 1) managing system performance; 2) developing local policy goals; 3) allocating resources; 4) designing, developing, and directing programs; 5) publically documenting system accomplishments; and 6) marketing the program to local employers.

2) Make guides as practical, simple, and clear as possible

In preparing written guides, designers should offer a clear explanation of the models, their key elements, uses, and limitations. Designers should not assume a high level of technical expertise across the SDA audience. Materials should emphasize practical considerations and be written in a straight forward and noncondescending style. Even SDA representatives with a relatively high degree of sophistication in evaluation methodologies will be put off by guides which appear to be highly academic and too far removed from the program environment. The guides should be understandable to administrators and policymakers and useful to staff with various functions in the SDA system - planners, managers, fiscal/MIS staff - as well as evaluation specialists. The guides should clearly indicate those areas of design and implementation where special technical expertise or outside guidance is advisable.

3) Encompass a range of design options

SDAs vary widely in regard to local program focus, organizational and service delivery structures, and system capabilities. If the models are to be widely used at local level, they must include options for tailoring evaluation designs to local circumstances, capabilities, and needs. Specifically, respondents expressed major concern that some options be provided that are realistic for SDAs with small grants and very limited staff capabilities.

While local constituencies expressed some concern for validity and reliability of results, they are more interested in capturing rich and useable feedback than in conducting rigorously scientific evaluations. SDA constituencies are wary of models which require experimental controls or complex sampling designs. They would like more practical options for collecting and analyzing feedback on program effectiveness and longer-term outcomes. They would like the design flexibility to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches. They would also like design packages which offer the flexibility to focus intensively on single program components or projects or to conduct broader systemwide assessments; to conduct a quick limited-purpose assessment or to incrementally implement a more extensive ongoing evaluation system.

4) Consider both national performance standards and local goals

SDA constituencies are concerned with analyzing and tracking system performance in regard to the national performance standards applied by the state in awarding performance incentive funds. They are also interested in evaluating the extent to which programs are achieving local policy goals. Models for ongoing evaluation initiatives at the local level should encompass the "uniform" performance standard indicators (including regression model adjustments, but they should also be flexible enough to allow SDAs to focus specifically on those goals of particular concern to local policymakers.

5) Back up models with technical assistance

Respondents recognize that there is a limit to the extent to which national guides can offer technical advice geared to local-level adoption and implementation of the models. Many respondents felt that the prospects of local SDAs actually using the suggested models would be greatly enhanced by a focused technical assistance and training effort.

SDA-level actors view evaluation initiatives with both interest and trepidation. Less sophisticated staff are particularly fearful of the potential technical difficulties involved in evaluation. Most SDA constituencies will need to be convinced that implementation of proposed evaluation approaches is both technically feasible and likely to produce outputs which are worth their efforts. Several respondents suggested regional workshops or on-site training provided by persons with actual experience in conducting successful evaluation initiatives at the local level.

LOCAL SYSTEM CAPABILITIES AND CONTINGENCIES

1) Data Collection, Retrieval, and Analysis

All of the SDAs surveyed have a management information system (MIS) which tracks program transactions (enrollments, training assignments, completions, terminations, and placement outcomes) and a variety of client characteristics and pre-program status measures on an individual participant basis. Most SDAs can break out participant-based performance indicators by major component or contractor on a monthly basis.

All but two of the SDAs operate separate systems for tracking financial transactions. While these systems allow for analysis of expenditures by major component or contractor, it is often difficult for SDAs to accurately compute indicators which integrate participant and financial data (such as cost per participant and cost per entered employment) on a current basis. Lack of integration in regard to financial and MIS data is viewed as a major limitation in local evaluation efforts by over one-third of the SDAs surveyed.

The majority of the SDAs (all of the Washington SDAs and over 60 percent of the national sample) are using management information systems which have been, or are in the process being, adopted on a statewide basis. All but one SDA will be tied into a statewide MIS by the end of the next program year. About one-quarter of the national sample SDAs were using the Washington State data flex software.

The hardware used for SDA MIS systems included: mainframe computers (used by a regional network of SDAs or part of a municipal system) (2 SDAs); mini computers (2 SDAs); micro computers (15 SDAs); and "dumb" terminals tied into a statewide computer (2 SDAs). Only one SDA was currently using a manual (card sort) MIS.

The SDAs most likely to be fully satisfied with their MIS capabilities were those using systems developed especially for local level use, which had a good deal of flexibility in data base management, retrieval and analysis. (These generally required mini or mainframe capabilities.)

SDAs using state-developed MIS packages with micro computers or dumb terminals were apt to complain that these systems were geared toward meeting state-level reporting requirements, rather than meeting local information and analysis needs. But those SDAs which had enhanced their systems with added program capabilities were, by and large, satisfied with the statewide system.

Only three SDAs reported that they were currently experiencing no problems with their MIS. The most commonly reported problems were: 1) lack of ability to break out needed data at a sufficient level of detail; 2) need for manual transcription/computation of plan vs performance indicators; 3) not being programmed for performance standard calculations; 4) lack of staff expertise in MIS operation and programming; and 5) system bugs and breakdowns. The majority of the SDAS were adjusting to new MIS systems. Many said they were still experimenting and had not yet fully tapped their systems' capabilities.

When asked how well equipped their MIS was to support evaluation activities currently underway or planned for the future, one-eighth of the SDA respondents rated their MIS capabilities as excellent. Three-fourths of the SDAs reported that their basic systems were at least adequate - though about half felt that adjustments and additional programming expertise would be required. Only four SDAs rated their systems as poor or inadequate for supporting local evaluation initiatives (and two of these SDAs expected to change their system during the coming program year.)

Most of the SDAs surveyed collect 30 day retention data on placements, which is integrated in the MIS data base. About one-quarter of the SDAs currently collect no additional follow-up data. About two-third collect or receive follow-up data on (at least a sample of) participants at 12 to 13 weeks following placement or termination. Only two of SDAs were currently collecting longer-term (4-12 months) follow-up data.

Most of the current follow-up systems have been initiated to meet state requirements, rather than to serve local purposes, according to SDA respondents. Only one-quarter of the SDAs are currently conducting locally designed follow-up efforts. Locally designed designed and initiated follow-ups are more likely to include employer-based as well as participant based contacts and to solicit qualitative feedback as well as objective data on employment retention and earnings. Only one SDA has a follow-up system which collects U.I. wage reporting data and welfare payments data both pre and post program termination.

Follow-up is a relatively new effort for most SDAs. Close to half of those surveyed indicated that they planned either to initiate new local follow-up designs or to expand, augment or improve existing follow-up efforts during the next six months. Only two of the SDAs were currently integrating follow-up data in the MIS data base, but of number of others said they planned to do so.

A number of SDAs reported as major evaluation constraints their inability to access information from the Employment Service (on participant earnings or employment status) or the welfare department (on welfare payments to participants.) Few SDAs were attempting to measure pre/post program increases in earning or employment stability or reductions in welfare payments. Most respondents felt that state JTPA officials should do more to expedite the release of such information.

In the "data block" environment, the Denver information sharing system constitutes a notable exception. Colorado is a wage reporting state, and the Denver SDA, which already has access to some U.I. and welfare data, will soon have the capability to directly interface with U.I. and welfare data bases, access needed pre and post program information on JTPA participants, and store this information in its own fully automated data base.

2) Funding Evaluation Initiatives

Scarcity of funds for conducting evaluation was viewed as a major obstacle by over two-thirds of the SDA respondents. SDAS with smaller II-A grants (under $2 million) found it especially difficult to set aside funds for conducting program evaluation activities when administrative budgets were already stretched to the limit. Even SDAs with larger II-A grants, greater administrative budgeting flexibility , and a history of substantial evaluation activity, reported considerable difficulty in breaking out funds for new evaluation initiatives.

Evaluation activities are often tied into other functions of the administrative entity, and many SDA respondents have some difficulty estimating dollar expenditures for specific evaluation initiatives. There is clearly a wide range of variation in the amounts that individual SDAs have expended on evaluation to date. Larger SDAs reported expenditures from annual administrative budgets of $15,000 to $50,000 to support ongoing follow-up efforts. A smaller SDA reported spending $6,000 on an assessment of current program effectiveness in serving harder-to-serve target groups. Another SDA of about the same size spent only 80 man hours (about $1,000) on an assessment of an institutional skills training project.

Some SDAs have found creative ways to fund follow-up efforts and other evaluation initiatives. One SDA director was successful in enlisting the cooperation of business school staff from a local university in developing a design for program performance review and follow-up and using graduate students to conduct the study. Another SDA with a Title II-A grant of less than $1 million got assistance from the National Alliance of Business in designing and conducting a program effectiveness assessment, with $3,000 in SDA resources matched by a $3,000 grant from the state.

Resource limitations are a major consideration in the design and implementation of evaluation activities, but it is clear that scarcity of funds need not preclude SDA-level evaluation.

3) Staffing Evaluation Initiatives

Capabilities for designing and staffing local evaluation initiatives vary widely among the SDAs surveyed. While one of the largest SDAs has over 60 persons on staff (some of which are involved in service delivery,) several of the smaller SDAs have only 2-3 staff persons in the entire administrative entity.

The bulk of SDA-level staff are deployed in contracts management, financial accounting, MIS, and PIC support. Only a handful (3 of the 23) of the SDAs we surveyed have one or more staff persons designated as evaluation specialists, and these are all larger systems.

While relatively few (less than 20 percent) of the SDAs surveyed admitted to a serious lack of local expertise for conducting evaluation, it is clear that much of the local evaluation activity is carried out by generalists or others with limited technical background in evaluation.

In about one-third of the SDA systems, other staff - MIS specialists, planners, program monitors, administrators - are charged with responsibility for evaluation-related activities. A number of respondents felt that there are clear advantages to allocating evaluation roles across various staff units, rather than vesting evaluation functions in an independent unit removed from ongoing system management and planning. But in over half of the SDAs surveyed, no one on the staff is charged with ongoing responsibility for program evaluation.

At least half of the SDAs that reported conducting follow-up contacts, intensive program reviews, or special assessment studies, have relied heavily on outside assistance. Outside resources used by SDA respondents included paid consultants, public interest organizations, student interns, university staff and graduate students, and, in several cases, program operators.

4) PIC Roles & Support for Evaluation

In the majority (two-thirds) of the SDAs surveyed, the Private Industry Council has a program evaluation or oversight committee which meets on at least a quarterly basis. In all of the SDAs, information on system performance is presented to the PIC on at least a quarterly basis. The emphasis to date in PIC oversight roles has been on performance monitoring, rather than effectiveness evaluation.

In most cases PIC members review plan vs performance statistics prepared by SDA staff, respond to performance problems redflagged by staff, and initiate or approve corrective action strategies. PIC Members are likely to become more substantivly involved in assessment issues through participation on program planning or funding committees, or subcommittees that focus on specific program components or issues.

PIC members would like better information for policy development, program funding, and design decisions, but they lack any clear picture of just how local evaluation efforts could improve the base of information and understanding. They tend to equate evaluation with statistical reports, and many PIC members are already feeling overloaded by the reams of performance data currently being generated and disseminated at the SDA level. As one PIC member pointed out: "There's a limit to how much any volunteer can read or digest on a regular basis. We don't need more information; what we need is better analysis."

PIC members will generally support special purpose assessments when there is a need for specific types of information. But SDA staff report that it is harder to gain support for sustained ongoing evaluation initiatives. Attempts to promote new evaluation initiatives that require substantial SDA-level investments must specifically address the concerns of PIC policymakers. PIC members will want to know how proposed evaluation models will assist them in policy development, planning, funding, and oversight, and in improving the quality of local programming.